



I'm Really Not The Demon God's Lackey



Translated by: **beetlebarker** Edited by: **undead demi-god**

Source: [novel-bin](#) Generated by: [lightnovel-crawler](#)

I'M Really Not The Demon God's Lackey

1. [Volume 1](#)

1. [Chapter 1 Welcome](#)
2. [Chapter 2 Words Heal And Teach](#)
3. [Chapter 3 Blood And Beast](#)
4. [Chapter 4 Concern For An Old Empty Nest](#)
5. [Chapter 5 Transmigrator Lin Jie](#)
6. [Chapter 6 Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies](#)
7. [Chapter 7 Gargoyle](#)
8. [Chapter 8 Joseph](#)
9. [Chapter 9 Hunters Never Turn Back](#)
10. [Chapter 10 You Failed?](#)
11. [Chapter 11 Love Is A Battlefield](#)
12. [Chapter 12 Where Did He Go?](#)
13. [Chapter 13 Steel Resolve](#)
14. [Chapter 14 Uncle, My Ass!](#)
15. [Chapter 15 Truly Good Friends](#)
16. [Chapter 16 Children's Bedtime Story](#)
17. [Chapter 17 Butcher In The Rainy Night](#)
18. [Chapter 18 No Other Choice](#)
19. [Chapter 19 Entrust It To Me](#)
20. [Chapter 20 S-Rank Zone](#)
21. [Chapter 21 Melissa](#)
22. [Chapter 22 Remember To Drink Your Milk](#)
23. [Chapter 23 Wheres The Circuit Breaker](#)
24. [Chapter 24 Dream-catcher](#)
25. [Chapter 25 Sky Wolf](#)
26. [Chapter 26 With My Carpet Of Needles And My Crown Of Snow](#)
27. [Chapter 27 Person In A Dream](#)
28. [Chapter 28 Philosopher](#)
29. [Chapter 29 Iris Flowers](#)

30. Chapter 30 Run
31. Chapter 31 Eight Extra Teeth
32. Chapter 32 Arm Wrestle
33. Chapter 33 Father-Daughter Conflict
34. Chapter 34 Heart Goes Out To All Parents
35. Chapter 35 Knowledge Is Power
36. Chapter 36 Master Key
37. Chapter 37 Anointed
38. Chapter 38 His Omniscience Is Divine
39. Chapter 39 Fresh Dog Meat Soup
40. Chapter 40 Fates Choice
41. Chapter 41 The Farmer And The Viper
42. Chapter 42 Do You Understand?
43. Chapter 43 Do Good Deeds Without Leaving A Name Behind
44. Chapter 44 Killing With A Borrowed Sword
45. Chapter 45 Cosplay
46. Chapter 46 Lin Jie's Old Profession
47. Chapter 47 Please Be Safe
48. Chapter 48 Prophet
49. Chapter 49 Were You Disturbed?
50. Chapter 50 Elder Sign
51. Chapter 51 Sellers Disposition
52. Chapter 52 In Front Of My Masters Door
53. Chapter 53 Hunting Wilde
54. Chapter 54 Let Him Be Our Eyes
55. Chapter 55 Doris Seed
56. Chapter 56 Go Ahead And Look Around
57. Chapter 57 Malicious Intentions
58. Chapter 58 Unraveling People
59. Chapter 59 Brand New Venture
60. Chapter 60 Chessboard
61. Chapter 61 Zero Cost Transaction
62. Chapter 62 Blood And Flesh Gos
63. Chapter 63 Businessman
64. Chapter 64 Transfer Application
65. Chapter 65 Your Next Words
66. Chapter 66 Evaluation Of Lin Jie
67. Chapter 67 Sorrow Of A Corporate Slave
68. Chapter 68 Eyes Of Gazing

69. Chapter 69 Demon Sword
70. Chapter 70 Do You Mind If I Draw It To Have A Better Look?
71. Chapter 71 This Sword Seems A Little Bit Dirty
72. Chapter 72 When The Stars Return
73. Chapter 73 Super Speed Learning
74. Chapter 74 Ackerman's Many Tiered Methods
75. Chapter 75 Wish You Success In Your Operation
76. Chapter 76 Good Firewood
77. Chapter 77 Time To Sleep
78. Chapter 78 Second Dream Realm
79. Chapter 79 Candela
80. Chapter 80 Slaying A God
81. Chapter 81 Is That The God You Were Talking About?
82. Chapter 82 Emerging From Legends
83. Chapter 83 The Rain Has Stopped
84. Chapter 84 The Sky Was Really Falling
85. Chapter 85 You're Welcome
86. Chapter 86 Mr. Lin Said It Well In
87. Chapter 87 Original Formula
88. Chapter 88 Clay Idol No.277
89. Chapter 89 Let Her Experience
90. Chapter 90 Bookstore Assistant
91. Chapter 91 Body Temperature Of Humans
92. Chapter 92 Hello, Mr. Lin
93. Chapter 93 Chapman Witch
94. Chapter 94 Children's Edition
95. Chapter 95 He Has Really Thought Through This Carefully
96. Chapter 96 Central District
97. Chapter 97 The
98. Chapter 98 Are They Alright?
99. Chapter 99 Modest And Low
100. Chapter 100 It

2. Volume 2

1. Chapter 101 The Last Ghost
2. Chapter 102 Vincent Was Rushing Over
3. Chapter 103 Witching Period

4. Chapter 104 Moon Within The Water
5. Chapter 105 Look, Father
6. Chapter 106 Addiction
7. Chapter 107 Please Give Me Guidance
8. Chapter 108 Sun Scripture
9. Chapter 109 Accepting The Truth
10. Chapter 110 That Child
11. Chapter 111 Ji Zhixius Repeated Visit
12. Chapter 112 Opened It By Accident
13. Chapter 113 The Strong Have Their Own Principles
14. Chapter 114 Two Secret Letters
15. Chapter 115 Scumbag Gang
16. Chapter 116 May I Have Your Rose
17. Chapter 117 Walpurgis
18. Chapter 118 Hell Is Empty, For
19. Chapter 119 Coin Of Destiny (1)
20. Chapter 120 Coin Of Destiny (2)
21. Chapter 121: This Might Just Be Fate
22. Chapter 122: Meeting Silver Again
23. Chapter 123: Swordsmanship And Aether
24. Chapter 124: Lawless Fanatical Truth-Seekers
25. Chapter 125: Burglary?
26. Chapter 126: One Sword Stroke
27. Chapter 127: Stealing Books
28. Chapter 128: Try Extracting My Knowledge
29. Chapter 129: Third Eye
30. Chapter 130: We No Longer Believe In Truth
31. Chapter 131: Blood Feast
32. Chapter 132: Tonight, A Flower Joins The Hunt
33. Chapter 133: Your Reputation Or Your Life
34. Chapter 134: Visiting Old Wil
35. Chapter 135: My Followers?
36. Chapter 136: Let Me Teach You How
37. Chapter 137: Sacrificial Ritual
38. Chapter 138: Its Cooked
39. Chapter 139: Shattered Glass
40. Chapter 140: Changing The Topic
41. Chapter 141: Husky
42. Chapter 142: Killing Three Birds With One Stone
43. Chapter 143: Dark Moon Apostle

44. Chapter 144: Terrifying
45. Chapter 145: Self-Immolation
46. Chapter 146: Praise The Sun!
47. Chapter 147: Silver Placenta
48. Chapter 148: Old Priest
49. Chapter 149: Another Gas Explosion?!
50. Chapter 150: Sailor Moon
51. Chapter 151: Chicken Soup Master Refusing To Concede
52. Chapter 152: Mhm, Yeah, That's Right
53. Chapter 153: Witch's Happy Chair
54. Chapter 154: Vincent Feels Lost
55. Chapter 155: Rodney: Aren't I One Too?
56. Chapter 156: Awaiting Sleep
57. Chapter 157: Buck, The End
58. Chapter 158: The Moon Extinguishes Its Light For You
59. Chapter 159: Enthusiastic Citizen Lin Jie
60. Chapter 160: To A Pleasant Partnership
61. Chapter 161: Heart Enchantment Seal
62. Chapter 162: Main Character Aura
63. Chapter 163: Living Parasites
64. Chapter 164: Please Descend
65. Chapter 165: The Same Dream
66. Chapter 166: Book Cafe Tonight
67. Chapter 167: There's Really No Need For A Gift
68. Chapter 168: Ancient Dragon Heart
69. Chapter 169: Boss Lins Identity
70. Chapter 170: Hes A Dragon
71. Chapter 171: Human Skin Book
72. Chapter 172: Bellas Recollection
73. Chapter 173: Dragons Descendant
74. Chapter 174: Michael
75. Chapter 175: He Knows Everything!
76. Chapter 176: Not Very Smart
77. Chapter 177: That's It?
78. Chapter 178: I Know That You Know That I Know What It Is
79. Chapter 179: Gathering At The Book Cafe
80. Chapter 180: Death To All Apostates
81. Chapter 181: Hell For Only One

82. Chapter 182: Unfathomable Astral Ocean
83. Chapter 183: The Sun Is Calling
84. Chapter 184: Joseph Began To Understand Everything
85. Chapter 185: As Soon As Possible
86. Chapter 186: Disappearing Act
87. Chapter 187: They Will Find It Difficult To Understand This
88. Chapter 188: When You Read A Book, The Book Is Also Looking Back At You
89. Chapter 189: Black Magician With A Dog
90. Chapter 190: Absolute Confidence
91. Chapter 191: My Idol, Wilde
92. Chapter 192: Let Me Introduce You All To Our Lord And Savior
93. Chapter 193: This Is Just Some Sort Of Demonic God!
94. Chapter 194: You Spoke Of Boss Lin, Didn't You?
95. Chapter 195: Retreat!
96. Chapter 196: Everything Was All A Stratagem Of Boss Lins!
97. Chapter 197: Cold Norzin Winter
98. Chapter 198: Reading Changes Destinies
99. Chapter 199: Awaken The Giant Within
100. Chapter 200: Knowledge

3. Volume 3

1. Chapter 201: False God Above The Dome
2. Chapter 202: Smite The False God
3. Chapter 203: I've Been Waiting For You To Show Up
4. Chapter 204: From Today On, The Church Of The Dome No Longer Exists In Norzin
5. Chapter 205: Two Sacred Artifacts
6. Chapter 206: Warm
7. Chapter 207: Don't Put It On
8. Chapter 208: Stone Gargoyle: WTF?!
9. Chapter 209: He Will Return From The Dead
10. Chapter 210: What Business Is It Of Yours If I Were To Destroy You
11. Chapter 211: This Other World Is Real Dangerous!
12. Chapter 212: Silvers Ring

13. Chapter 213: Walpurgis Felt Cheated On
14. Chapter 214: Meow
15. Chapter 215: What Do You Mean What Bookstore?
16. Chapter 216: Where The Hell Is My Door?!
17. Chapter 217: Medicinal Herbs: A Compendium
18. Chapter 218: Primordial Tome Of Potions
19. Chapter 219: Scapegoat
20. Chapter 220: I Should Visit The Bookstore
21. Chapter 221: Lin Jie's Followers
22. Chapter 222: All Willingly
23. Chapter 223: Teacher Lin's Class
24. Chapter 224: I've Reported The Bookstore
25. Chapter 225: Whats Wrong
26. Chapter 226: With No Warning Or Indication
27. Chapter 227: Boss Lin's True Motive
28. Chapter 228: Doris Within The Dream
29. Chapter 229: Lin Jie Is Watching
30. Chapter 230: Subterranean Walker
31. Chapter 231: He Had Seen It Coming
32. Chapter 232: God Said (I)
33. Chapter 233: God Said (Ii)
34. Chapter 234: Shepherd Of The Stars
35. Chapter 235: Citrus
36. Chapter 236: Medicinal Study
37. Chapter 237: Cat Food Delivery
38. Chapter 238: Gifting A Clock
39. Chapter 239: Clock-wheel Worm
40. Chapter 240: Call Him Over For A Bit
41. Chapter 241: Gate Of Truth
42. Chapter 242: All Things Are One
43. Chapter 243: Equivalent Exchange
44. Chapter 244: Fear
45. Chapter 245: Godspeed
46. Chapter 246: Curiosity Killed The Cat
47. Chapter 247: The Non-Existent Bookstore
48. Chapter 248: Raziel Stopped Thinking
49. Chapter 249: Don't Come Any Closer!
50. Chapter 250: Protect The Best — Boss Lin
51. Chapter 251: How Heinous
52. Chapter 252: Joint Forces Success

53. Chapter 253: The Lords Inaction Is Wisdom
54. Chapter 254: Arrangement
55. Chapter 255: Ji And A16 Manor
56. Chapter 256: Boss Lin Is All Mine!
57. Chapter 257: The Birthday Party
58. Chapter 258: Opportunity
59. Chapter 259: Wine Of Immortality
60. Chapter 260: Mission Accomplished
61. Chapter 261: Pearl Milk Tea
62. Chapter 262: Great, You Are Spirited!
63. Chapter 263: Unattainable Mastery Of Alchemy
64. Chapter 264: Darkness Underneath The Light
65. Chapter 265: Gulp
66. Chapter 266: Winning Over A Customers Heart
67. Chapter 267: Y-Young M-M-Miss
68. Chapter 268: Asserting His Dominance
69. Chapter 269: A Test
70. Chapter 270: Isn't That Funny?
71. Chapter 271: Blackie Whom He Hadn't Seen For A Long Time
72. Chapter 272: One More Thing
73. Chapter 273: How To Tactfully Reject A Relationship
74. Chapter 274: Great Race
75. Chapter 275: Handpicked Books
76. Chapter 276: Some Hypotheses About Blackie
77. Chapter 277: Fate Has Allowed Me To Grant You An Opportunity
78. Chapter 278: Despicable Is The Epitaph Of Those That Are Despicable
79. Chapter 279: Restoring The Stone Gargoyle
80. Chapter 280: Great Friends
81. Chapter 281: A Knight Cannot Go Back On His Words
82. Chapter 282: Once Bitten, Twice Shy
83. Chapter 283: The Power Of Food
84. Chapter 284: Familiar Journal
85. Chapter 285: Professor Lin
86. Chapter 286: God Has Come
87. Chapter 287: Lin Jie's Tampered Cognition
88. Chapter 288: A Fatter Blackie
89. Chapter 289: Hes Smiling!

90. Chapter 290: It's Impossible For The Pigeon To Be Here
91. Chapter 291: The World Today Isn't Safe
92. Chapter 292: Lin Jie's Father
93. Chapter 293: Mantis Stalks The Cicada
94. Chapter 294: Unaware Of The Oriole Behind
95. Chapter 295: Mu'En Now Understood
96. Chapter 296: Brood-mother
97. Chapter 297: Godly Domain
98. Chapter 298: The Hand Reaching Out From The Shadows
99. Chapter 299: Here's A Present For You
100. Chapter 300: Its Justifiable For Bosses To Like Their Employees

4. Volume 4

1. Chapter 301: Five Books
2. Chapter 302: Recipe Book
3. Chapter 303: Can't Stop Myself
4. Chapter 304: Raid On The Corpse Devouring Sect
5. Chapter 305: The Truth Union's Request
6. Chapter 306: The Void Intermediary's Demonstration Of Strength
7. Chapter 307: The Sullen Void
8. Chapter 308: Operation Start
9. Chapter 309: Death-match
10. Chapter 310: Key
11. Chapter 311: Idol
12. Chapter 312: You Are Impure
13. Chapter 313: They Never Left
14. Chapter 314: Justice, A Concern
15. Chapter 315: No Brain
16. Chapter 316: One Of Our Own
17. Chapter 317: Winter Had Arrived
18. Chapter 318: He's Left The Bookstore!
19. Chapter 319: Eruption
20. Chapter 320: Stage
21. Chapter 321: Cooperation
22. Chapter 322: Questioning
23. Chapter 323: A Fierce Scheme

24. Chapter 324: Your Method Is Wrong
25. Chapter 325: Free Things Are The Most Expensive
26. Chapter 326: The Night Has Only Just Begun
27. Chapter 327: A Thing Or Two
28. Chapter 328: To Each Their Own
29. Chapter 329: First Dance
30. Chapter 330: Become A Race
31. Chapter 331: The Disappearing Smile
32. Chapter 332: Another Way To Categorize
33. Chapter 333: Go Back Home And Take A Look
34. Chapter 334: Intent To Murder
35. Chapter 335: Next Time
36. Chapter 336: You-You-You-You
37. Chapter 337: Lin Jie And The American Cockroach
38. Chapter 338: A New Victim
39. Chapter 339: Straight Balling
40. Chapter 340: Call
41. Chapter 341: Could This All Have Been Part Of His Plan?
42. Chapter 342: Battlefield
43. Chapter 343: Humans Die When Killed
44. Chapter 344: Entering Dream
45. Chapter 345: I Killed Someone Today
46. Chapter 346: No Secular Desire
47. Chapter 347: Silver's Farewell
48. Chapter 348: Confrontation
49. Chapter 349: Be More Careful When You Are Walking
50. Chapter 350: Snowflake
51. Chapter 351: Wilde's Way Out
52. Chapter 352: Caught In Her Own Trap
53. Chapter 353: Boss Lin's Instructions
54. Chapter 354: He's Going To Eat
55. Chapter 355: Three-Second Rule
56. Chapter 356: It's A Shame To Waste Food
57. Chapter 357: Treating Social Phobia
58. Chapter 358: How A Sorceress Was Raised
59. Chapter 359: Original Sin And Heart's Demons
60. Chapter 360: Are You Jealous Of Me?
61. Chapter 361: Answer Handed In To Boss Lin
62. Chapter 362: Such An Organization

63. Chapter 363: Inseparable
64. Chapter 364: Older Gingers Are Spicier
65. Chapter 365: Void Palm
66. Chapter 366: Lin Jie's Birthday Present
67. Chapter 367: Toy
68. Chapter 368: Father And Daughter
69. Chapter 369: Joseph And Wilde
70. Chapter 370: I Want To See Boss Lin!
71. Chapter 371: Who Will Become Light
72. Chapter 372: Sparks
73. Chapter 373: Start A Prairie Fire
74. Chapter 374: What Did You Say?
75. Chapter 375: The Fluttering
76. Chapter 376: If It Be A Long Night, I'll Be Daybreak
77. Chapter 377: It's Really Not Scary At All
78. Chapter 378: Perfect Ending
79. Chapter 379: The Two Of Them Can't Come
80. Chapter 380: Dead, But Not Dead
81. Chapter 381: Same Origin
82. Chapter 382: Dawn's Revival
83. Chapter 383: Safe Place
84. Chapter 384: The Final Banquet
85. Chapter 385: It Has Stopped Snowing
86. Chapter 386: Price Of Free-Riding
87. Chapter 387: Hi, Boss Lin
88. Chapter 388: He's Implying
89. Chapter 389: Maria
90. Chapter 390: Family
91. Chapter 391: Periodic Subsidence
92. Chapter 392: Opening A Branch
93. Chapter 393: Reach A Consensus
94. Chapter 394: Refugees
95. Chapter 395: How To Pickle
96. Chapter 396: Help Someone All The Way
97. Chapter 397: Shocked For Quite A Long While
98. Chapter 398: The Night Elves' Plan
99. Chapter 399: It's A Small World
100. Chapter 400: It's Really A Small World

5. Volume 5

1. Chapter 401: Let's Go Have Some Fun
2. Chapter 402: Reveal The Truth
3. Chapter 403: Chaos
4. Chapter 404: I Want That Book
5. Chapter 405: Time To Head Home
6. Chapter 406: We Await Your Return
7. Chapter 407: Inverse Tree
8. Chapter 408: Monument Of Fire, Wedge Of Life
9. Chapter 409: Invitation
10. Chapter 410: That Bookstore Owner Isn't That Strong
11. Chapter 411: Nothing To Fear!
12. Chapter 412: Old Wil Died?
13. Chapter 413: Heart
14. Chapter 414: Invitation To Tea
15. Chapter 415: What A Coincidence
16. Chapter 416: Blackie's Prank
17. Chapter 417: Return Of Life
18. Chapter 418: Eat Fresh
19. Chapter 419: Welcome
20. Chapter 420: Lack Of Imagination
21. Chapter 421: 'I'
22. Chapter 422: Lin Minghai's Journal
23. Chapter 423: Child
24. Chapter 424: Sis Ji Zhixiu
25. Chapter 425: Eternally Pure
26. Chapter 426: The Truth Of Secret Rite Tower
27. Chapter 427: All Of It Was Deception
28. Chapter 428: Witch's Smile
29. Chapter 429: Duan Xuemin
30. Chapter 430: Just That?
31. Chapter 431: Definitely Not Human!
32. Chapter 432: Will You Devour Me
33. Chapter 433: Close Your Eyes
34. Chapter 434: Are You God?
35. Chapter 435: Obliterate! Instant Death!
36. Chapter 436: Showdown!
37. Chapter 437: Fruit Beneath The Inverse Tree
38. Chapter 438: Witch Of Trees
39. Chapter 439: Silver
40. Chapter 440: Dream And Reality

41. Chapter 441: Boss Lin Left
42. Chapter 442: Spider Woman
43. Chapter 443: Feel The Grace Of God
44. Chapter 444: Silver Dragon
45. Chapter 445: A Place Darker Than The Village Of Dark Night
46. Chapter 446: Lower District
47. Chapter 447: Red
48. Chapter 448: Deeper
49. Chapter 449: Church Of Pestilence's Purpose
50. Chapter 450: Gods Bestowment
51. Chapter 451: Problem Of Hunger Solved
52. Chapter 452: Dreams
53. Chapter 453: Return Home
54. Chapter 454: I'll Send You All Home
55. Chapter 455: There Once Was A Boss Lin
56. Chapter 456: Welcome (End)

Volume 1

Chapter 1 Welcome

Chapter 1: Welcome

Lin Jie opened the bookstore's old wooden door as per usual.

A muffled chime sounded from a bronze bell. Streams of water trickled down the door frame from above, leaving vestiges on the dirt-covered transom window.

The sky was murky. It was pouring heavily outside, the pitter-patter of rain and vapor creating a foggy curtain.

Puddles of water had accumulated outside the store .

“Such a heavy downpour , ” remarked the frowning Lin Jie.

He was a little miffed at his shirt and trousers getting wet.

“This heavy precipitation that began last night will continue for approximately a week. The Meteorological Center has issued a yellow warning , which could rise to red...”

Audio from the neighboring shop's TV was quickly drowned up by the rain.

It was unlikely that there would be any business for the bookstore under such weather

“Sigh.”

Lin Jie pulled out a triangular supporting frame and wooden board from behind the door to make a simple step at the entrance before flipping the hanging sign to display “Open”.

It was unlikely for there to be too many customers under such weather. It looked like it was going to be a quiet day for the bookstore.

‘ Rather than to open for such lackluster business, why not go back to

sleep ? ' This was probably what most people would think .

” But what if someone were to get caught in the rain without an umbrella and needs a place to wait it out ?”

Lin Jie took a book from the rental shelf before heading toward the counter. He casually flicked on a warm lamp along the way before placing a towel by the side. After that, he brewed two cups of piping hot tea before finally settling down behind the counter.

He flipped the book over to where he last stopped before pushing a cup of hot tea across the counter, as if passing it to a new acquaintance.

A book and a cup of hot tea.

The tools needed to warm a lost person's body and soul.

Lin Jie took a sip from his own cup and smiled.

Indeed, he was just this sort of kind hearted romantic. Despite being an ordinary man , he was known by his customers as a n honest man and a life mentor adept at doling out chicken soup.

Life should always be filled with anticipation, ain't it so?

Crack!

With a twist of her hands, Ji Zhixiu snapped the neck of the person caught in her clutches. However, the battle was not over yet. She quickly turned around and drew a long blade to sever the neck of another man.

“Gurk...”

The man 's head fell to the ground, his eyes still wide open.

Ji Zhixiu pushed the two bodies a way from her before walking out of the alley.

A heap consisting of more than ten corpses was left in her wake. They gradually burned up and turned to ashes.

This was the aftermath of an alley fight in this downpour.

Blood that had seeped through her black formal dress during the fight dripped onto the ground, evaporating into a wisp of acrid steam that was immediately washed away by the rain.

Her body temperature was rising rapidly. Her blood and muscle started to squirm, painfully alerting her of the number of broken ribs she had.

But this wasn't a problem to her.

As a hunter who had sordid blood injected into her blood-stream, it would only take her an hour to fully recover from such injuries .

"Time, I need time."

She looked ahead of her .

Vaguely concealed amidst a curtain of rain was a bookstore with faint light peeking through its glass windows. Through the window, she could faintly make out rows of bookshelves.

Aside from the bookstore, everything else in the area was dark.

There were many shops in the vicinity, but with such heavy rain, this was the only one in operation.

The hanging sign at the entrance displayed "Open", and there was a crudely made step for easy accessibility at the entrance. It looked strangely incongruous with its surroundings.

What was even more coincidental was that it was located directly opposite to the alley she had come out from.

"Is it a coincidence or a trap?"

Ji Zhixiu didn't have the luxury to stop and think things through . She believed that her fellow hunters could sniff her out with their

acute sense of smell, honing in on her like sharks even in this torrential downpour.

She needed to find somewhere to hide as soon as possible and buy sufficient time for her to recover .

Shing!

The long blade in her hand retracted back into its mechanism , turning into a seemingly ordinary black metal cane i n the blink of an eye.

Ji Zhixiu trudged toward the bookstore amidst the rain and pushed its door open.

The interior of the bookstore was very quiet. She stepped in together with her cane, and it didn't take her long to spot the boss of the bookstore .

It was a young man seated behind the counter, reading a book. His shirt and trousers were entirely black.

In contrast to his dark, slightly messy hair, his skin was fairly pale. His slender fingers were holding up a teacup as he gently flipped the pages of the book.

There was another cup on the counter with steam still swirling from it , but n o one was on the high stool in front of the counter.

Ji Zhixiu actually had an uncanny feeling that this cup of tea and seat was prepared for her. Feeling a little weirded out, she quickly scanned the entire bookstore with her gaze.

It was n arrow and cramped.

Aside from the brimming bookshelves, there were many books strewn all over the floor. Half of the stairway leading to the second floor was blocked by bookshelves, and the windows were mostly caked with dust, giving off an eerie vibe.

The only source of light in this dark, dank bookstore was the lamp sitting on the counter top, and the young man sitting behind it gave

off an air of mystery.

There was even a towel on the counter...

Drip! Drip!

Water was dripping off her thoroughly drenched self. Her wet hair was sticking to her neck, and her low cut dress revealed her fair, supple skin .

"Welcome."

Lin Jie looked up with warm yellow light reflected in his dark pupils.

With a smile, he pushed the cup of hot tea towards Ji Zhixiu. " It looks like my long wait hasn't been in vain . The rain has washed a beautiful customer into my humble bookstore."

Complementing a customer's aesthetics was a part of good service .

That being said , the person standing before Lin Jie was undeniable a beauty. Despite being thoroughly drenched, her beautiful features akin to a delicately chiseled sculpture and ivory white skin was still faintly discernible in the dim light.

He felt that his wait had been worthwhile.

It looks like this customer needs a good heart-to-heart chat. Maybe I can make a new friend today... and perhaps a regular too?

This was definitely not the thoughts of an avaricious businessman, but genuine concern and goodwill!

Ji Zhixiu eyed the cup of tea before her with narrowed pupils.

" Long wait "— this meant that the young man knew about it and had been deliberately waiting for her?

Or could there be other motives in play?

Regardless, this bookstore was oozing with weirdness . The

coincidental timing and this fellow's unruffled expression clearly relayed that things weren't that simple.

Is it Secret Rite Tower? Or the Truth Union? Maybe a liaison of Walpurgis?

Ji Zhixiu became more vigilant than ever. She discreetly moved her finger toward the button that activated the black cane's mechanism. As soon as the young man made a move , the cane would morph into a killing blade that pierces through his skull.

"You were waiting for me?" The hunter probed.

Lin Jie answered with a kind smile , "Yes . I've always thought that fate works in miraculous ways, how it brings two complete strangers together in the least expected way."

He gestured toward the counter and continued, " Feel free to use the towel there to wipe yourself dry . Don't worry, it's unused. Would you like me to turn on the heater ?"

Ji Zhixiu picked up the towel hesitantly and shook her head. " It's fine. "

Taking a closer look at his customer, Lin Jie noticed her tightly creased brows. Referencing from past experiences, he surmised that this person might be facing a predicament in his life. Thus, he cleared his throat and asked , "From the look of things, you seem to have encountered some trouble? >

Chapter 2 Words Heal And Teach

Chapter 2: Words Heal And Teach

Over the years, Lin Jie had chatted with all sorts of customers and grasped some basic observation and communication abilities.

The line ‘ *you seem to have encountered some trouble*’ didn’t carry any significance on its own. It was similar to how fortune tellers would always start with, “ *There’s an ominous aura looming around you.* “— it was a psychological suggestion.

It was somewhat like a flag in a game. Once the conditions are met, the next part of the conversation would follow suit .

Whenever people hear the word “trouble”, they would subconsciously ponder over whether they had really encountered any recent trouble. It went without saying that the lives of most people wouldn’t be smooth sailing all the way.

Troubles, whether big or small, were still troubles.

And once a customer began grumbling , it would be time for Teacher Lin to dole out chicken soup and close the distance.

However, there was also a chance of failure when resorting to these sorts of cold-reading tricks.

For example, the other party could be really blessed with extreme luck throughout their life, or perhaps, he might be guarded against strangers, making it difficult to communicate.

However, Lin Jie was very confident that he could make this person open up, for the drenched lady before him was indeed in an extremely terrible predicament.

Ji Zhixiu was wiping herself dry when she suddenly stopped in her

tracks to raise her head and look at the smiling young man behind the counter. “Yes, I’ve encountered a vexing problem.”

She was unable to determine whether this person was friend or foe, but even if he was a foe, it was unlikely for her to escape from this seemingly mystical entity in her current weakened state.

Since he was making things unnecessarily complicated, she would just play along with him. She would find out this fellow’s objective and see how divine he was.

If he was a friend, this would be a pleasant surprise.

If he was an enemy, then she would seize more time for her to rest.

Meanwhile, Lin Jie noticed that her eyes weren’t black but a shade of iron gray. There were glittering specks in her pupils that resembled beautifully polished gems. At the top of her ear, there was a three centimeter gash that was still glistening with blood.

No matter how he looked at her , this woman was someone with many stories to share.

Lin Jie asked, ” Are you facing troubles in your interpersonal relationships?

Since there hadn’t been any complaints about this downpour thus far, the next most likely problem for women of her age would be relationship issues.

Of course, he couldn’t limit it to just love, friendship or family, so he chose to use the words—interpersonal relationship

A common technique that swindlers, mediums, and Teacher Lin employed was to throw out something vague to provide for some room of error.

On the other hand, Ji Zhixiu’s heart suddenly grew heavy upon hearing those words.

It was just 20 minutes ago that she was betrayed by her hunter group in a secret venue. The ones who were hunting her down right

now were none other than her ex-comrades.

Avarice had blinded their eyes.

In other words, Lin Jie wasn't wrong to say that she was facing troubles in her interpersonal relationship .

Ji Zhixiu was shocked. An outsider had learned of this matter in the short span of just 20 minutes. Such speed of dissemination definitely couldn't have been retrospect.

There could only be two possibilities.

One, he had planted informants within her hunter group, and those informants tipped him off right after the matter occurred.

Two, this young man before her had some kind of all-knowing ability

Ji Zhixiu watched silently as the towel, which was now seeped in dark red blood, gradually evaporated into wisps of tart smoke before she finally took a seat by the counter. She tapped her fingers lightly against the teacup in front of her before speaking softly, "I was betrayed."

Oh? That's surprising.

Lin Jie raised his eyebrows.

This is more melodramatic than I thought. Did her boyfriend have an affair behind her back, or was she back-stabbed by one of her close friends?

This was indubitably top-level gossip, but Teacher Lin was a life mentor and not some middle-aged auntie who talked behind others' back.

The melodrama only meant that there was more to unearth from her .

"There are two sides to everything in this world. You were betrayed, but it could have also been an opportunity for you to see

what kind of people they truly are”

Lin Jie lifted the teapot and topped up her cup with more hot tea before continuing earnestly, “Those who choose to leave will eventually leave. Once they have made up their minds, they can come up with thousands of reasons to justify it.”

Ji Zhixiu could deeply relate with those words .

The Magic Ovum Mirror was merely the fuse that ignited their greed. Even if not for that, a day would eventually come where they would make the same decision as they had today.

It would still be the same outcome, just for a different reason.

Ji Zhixiu rubbed a cold hand on the cup, then said in a self-deprecating manner, “You are absolutely right , but I have already lost far too much from this betrayal. What use is it for me to see through them now?”

Lost far too much... She must have had her heart broken by a scumbag. Haa, how pitiful.

Lin Jie felt sympathy for her.

Wounds on the body can be easily treated, but wounds in the heart take a long time to heal. It was times like this that his exceptional counsel was most needed!

Lin Jie placed both hands on his chin as he scrutinized Ji Zhixiu closely. A moment later, he spoke with a resolute tone, “It’ ll be useful. You have learned to discern one’s true face and false intentions. You wouldn’t take pity on those who have once hurt you because of your past relationship anymore. The pain you are suffering now will make you wiser than before.”

These words were strong and resonating!

Ji Zhixiu stared into Lin Jie’s ink, blank eyes, and her breathing unknowingly grew heavier.

Under the dim, warm light, his eyes seemed to carry some sort of

mysterious magic that drew her in. She could sense both sympathy and partiality from him, as if he was a higher being who embraced all lives and guided humans toward the right direction.

It took a while before Ji Zhixiu snapped out of her daze, and she shook her head vigorously.

She felt that the young man before her had some goal in mind for approaching her here. At this point, the impression she got from him was that he wasn't an enemy but an ally who wanted to help her deal with the hunter group...

Hunters who utilized the sordid blood of dream beasts as their source of power were considered to be evil in the eyes of upright magicians. Ji Zhixiu deduced that this person wasn't in any of the three factions she had guessed earlier, but rather, he was a high-level magician that hated hunters.

Those thugs had an innate mastery of language and words.

"Then..."

Ji Zhixiu steeled her resolve and took a deep breath. "What should I do?"

"Since they have acted inhumanely, there's no need to uphold civility with them. You can deal with them the exact same way they dealt with you. A tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye!" replied Lin Jie.

He didn't dish out the usual chicken soup that numbed one's soul. Otherwise, she would be led astray, making it difficult to retain her as a regular.

When faced with scumbags, one ought to retaliate with a heavy blow!

His customer appeared to be in a bewildered state at the moment, but as long as he pointed out a path for her, she would be able to free herself from confusion and take action.

The disposition of a magician indeed !

Ji Zhixiu opened up her other palm, which was hidden under the table. It was covered with blood. Her lips moved slightly.

... Casting aside my humanity?

She was neither prepared nor resolved to go that far yet.

“You need to need to ascertain your thoughts and intentions first. Only then can you prepare yourself properly.”

Lin Jie calmly gazed at the now pensive lady with a smile.

“I think you might need this book.”

The time was ripe for Lin Jie to show his hand, and he smoothly directed the conversation toward his wares.

Given the atmosphere, it didn't seem wise for him to pick out a book from the shelves behind him. That would make his intention too obvious.

So, he slid the book he was reading over, *Confessions* .

Ji Zhixiu received it over with a blank look on her face. There were three words written on the cover — *Blood and Beast* .

She had read a lot of books over the course of her life, but she had never seen this book before.

Was it written by an obscure writer? Furthermore, why had she been given this book?

With a slight frown, Ji Zhixiu flipped the book open hesitantly. A moment later, her pupils shrunk and her expression changed.

The page was filled with ancient characters densely packed together. These ancient characters warped, combined, and fluctuated all the time. No two lines of characters were the same, but they strung together to form meaningful sentences. Each and every one of these characters could form thousands of words!

This is... taboo knowledge!

The hunter's face was pale and her body trembled. The information contained within was terrifying and it made her nauseated.

She immediately closed the book, and it took her a great effort to regulate her breathing.

A message had already been etched inside her terrified mind.

“Beast Mutation! >

Chapter 3 Blood And Beast

Chapter 3: Blood And Beast

“Beast Mutation !”

Ji Zhixiu nearly shot right up from her seat out of shock, but she managed to restrain her impulse at the final moment.

These words were so firmly etched in her mind as if they had been there all this while. She wondered if this searing pain was something one would feel when being branded.

Beast Transformation: Drawing power from blood, and using blood to control...

Ji Zhixiu’s eyelids twitched as she held the book with hands trembling in trepidation. What exactly was this?!

Hunters drew their strength from the sordid blood of dream beasts. Through injecting themselves with a drug made out of sordid blood, they could gain a portion of the power of the abyss. However, such an act was extremely dangerous, and there was a high chance of dying on the first injection.

This eventually became known as the threshold for becoming a hunter.

On top of that, if the dosage exceeded a certain limit, the hunter would be unable to control the devastating prowess of the sordid blood in his body and become ‘infected’, leading to the occurrence of a certain phenomenon.

This phenomenon could be split into three stages: Personality distortion, loss of rationality, and physical mutation.

The higher the concentration of sordid blood, the stronger the hunter and the prowess of the transformation.

Amongst the different types of physical mutation, the most

commonly seen one was beast mutation.

And it was nigh impossible to control a beast mutation!

Veteran hunters who had accumulated too much sordid blood possessed unimaginable strength, but at the same time, they underwent great suffering due to their beast mutation phenomenon.

It was true that Ji Zhixiu had considered ‘casting aside her humanity’ to undergo a second injection so as to gain the power needed to exact vengeance, but she had never thought that this mysterious bookstore owner would actually give her the method to control sordid blood!

This meant that she would be able to control her beast mutation, a problem which neither hunters nor magicians had been able to solve since ancient times!

“Confessions...”

Sensing the blood in her body slowly coming under her control, Ji Zhixiu’s raspy voice quivered in a mixture of excitement and agitation as she asked, “Is this what you want me to do?”

The man standing before her was a real madman!

An unbelievably powerful one at that!

One must know that this knowledge was more than enough to topple the current system of hunter groups! As soon as this skill was spread amongst the people, the hunters would be able to break free of their reliance on sordid blood.

This was an undertaking equivalent to a crusade to change the old world. There was no saying what would come out of this—she could become lauded as a saint or condemned as a sinner.

But in any case, the choice of fate was currently in her hands, and she wanted to change the old world that had long gone out of time.

Ji Zhixiu’s breathing got heavier and heavier as she lowered her head to stare at the book in her hands. Her panting echoed

exceptionally loudly in this quiet little bookstore.

On the other hand, Lin Jie sighed in silence as he watched the lowered, trembling head in front of him.

Haa, she's just like any other young lady in the face of a breakup.

Despite appearing to be a strong, independent woman, she had a vulnerable side to her too..

With just a few words of encouragement and comfort, she's already on the verge of crying.

At times like this, tears didn't just represent sadness. It could also be a sign of being ready to let go of the past in preparation to move forward.

After revealing her vulnerable side, what she needed next was an injection of self-confidence. She should be given the courage to believe in herself, that she could stand proudly before the harshness of the world and face it!

"Yes, you need to do it. You must do it. Cast aside your remorse and face yourself honestly."

The young man spoke with a lowered tone. It sounded as if he was talking to her and to himself at the same time.

"Once the last trumpet sounds, I shall present myself before the sovereign judge with this book in my hand, and loudly proclaim, thus have I acted; these were my thoughts; such was I. Such as I was, I have declared myself; sometimes vile and despicable, at others, virtuous, generous and sublime; even as thou hast read my inmost soul;"

What Lin Jie narrated was an excerpt of original text from ***Confessions***

He looked at Ji Zhixiu with a smile and continued, "Like wild beasts, everyone has primitive desires. That's just how reality is, isn't it?"

Ji Zhixiu raised her head, only to see Lin Jie raising his cup and clinking it against hers.

“Cheers to a new tomorrow. What do you say?”

After a long time...

Jin Zhixiu put down the book and picked up the cup earnestly. She smiled and nodded prudently in response. “Thank you for your guidance. I will comply with your wishes.”

Lin Jie had just taken a sip when he noticed Jin Zhixiu’s actions and froze up.

Did she just gulp down the entire cup of tea ? That was just a symbolic gesture! I just wanted her to have some hot tea to warm herself up...

Furthermore, I have only topped it up moments ago. It must have still been boiling hot!

How in the world did she drink the whole thing in the blink of an eye?!

Never-mind, never-mind.

She has just been jilted after all. She might not be in the right frame of mind...

Lin Jie put down his cup uneasily. He hesitated for a brief moment, but he decided to ask it in the end, “Do you need to head to the hospital?”

Ji Zhixiu shook her head. “Thank you for your concern, I’m fine.”

Most of her wounds had already healed up during the exchange. This was the power of sordid blood.

Alright then. Since she’s already said so, I’ll just assume that she’s fine.

After all, she wouldn’t have been able to continue speaking so casually with me if she had really been scalded.

“Would you like to rest a little longer?”

Lin Jie brought out a black umbrella from beneath the counter and shook it. “It’s unfortunate that my cramped bookstore doesn’t have much space, so I can only keep you here till tonight.

“Here’s an umbrella. You can take it along with the book. The due date for returning the book is a month with a maximum extension of another seven days. Remember to bring the umbrella along with you when you drop by to return the book.”

Rather than a bookstore, it felt more apt to call it a book warehouse. There were only bookshelves in the store aside from books.

“I’ll leave in a moment’s time.”

Jin Zhixiu took the umbrella before receiving the register book Lin Jie was passing over to write down her personal particulars and sign it off. She then raised her head to look at Lin Jie and asked cautiously, “May I know a little more about you?”

Me?

I didn’t go overboard with my words right? Or are heartbroken girls just that vulnerable?

Lin Jie blinked in surprise before swiftly putting on a professional smile. “I’m Lin Jie. I’m just an ordinary boss of a bookstore who likes helping others.”

He placed the book in a plastic bag and looked at the name on the register.

Ji Zhixiu... Hmm?

Doesn’t the sole daughter of the underground resource development magnate, Ji Bodong, go by the name of Ji Zhixiu too?

Lin Jie was confident in his memory, and the name ‘Ji Zhixiu’ was rather atypical too. He was quite certain of it.

Not to mention, the lady before him was dressed in an evening gown that appeared to be custom-made. It was not the kind of attire that an average person could afford.

Lin Jie tried his best to maintain his composure as he silently tucked the register away.

This is quite the big fish

I can definitely cheat... I mean, earn enough money to renovate the bookstore!

On the other hand, Ji Zhixiu assumed that Lin Jie was unwilling to divulge his identity, but she wasn't disappointed by his response. On the contrary, she felt a surge of anticipation.

She thought that this was a trial, and that she had to prove herself worthy. She needed to use her own strength to get rid of all of the traitors and return within the stipulated deadline of one month.

And after that, she would be able to seek out the next step...

Ji Zhixiu took two steps back from the counter. With the cane tucked under her armpit and the book and the umbrella in each of her hands, she bowed deeply.

"Well then, have a good night."

Lin Jie scratched his head. *Well, she's an affluent young missy after all, but such etiquette is still a little too exaggerated.*

Ji Zhixiu exhaled deeply before rising back up. She walked out of the store, closed the door, opened the umbrella, and walked into the rain.

But all of a sudden, her entire body went on high alert as she grasped her cane, ready to activate its mechanism at any moment.

A stooped old man with an umbrella was walking towards her. He was holding a book in hand >

Chapter 4 Concern For An Old Empty Nest

Chapter 4: Concern For An Old Empty Nester

Ji Zhixun stood completely still in the pouring rain as the old man walked toward her. She couldn't even react and activate the mechanism of the black cane when the latter passed her by.

It wasn't that she didn't want to do so, but an invisible power had enveloped her, causing her body to stiffen up. Cold sweat wouldn't stop flowing down her back.

The old man was dressed in an out-fashioned western style suit topped with a gentleman's hat. His gaze was strangely drawn to the book Ji Zhixiu was holding.

"It's this book. Lucky lass," he muttered in a hoarse, raspy voice.

Under the concealment of the umbrella, Ji Zhixiu could vaguely see an ancient black iron mask covering the old man's face. She could only see her beady snake-like eyes peering out of the mask, directing a razor-sharp gaze at her. It looked oddly dissonant with his refined appearance.

Ji Zhixiu only managed to catch a glimpse of the red words on his black book cover when the old man passed her by— **Void Extinguishing**.

A chilling, eerie sensation crept over her bare skin.

"Whew..."

Ji Zhixiu heaved a huge sigh of relief before slowly turning her head back toward the bookstore .

Muffled voices sounded as the door slowly closed.

"Welcome ... Ahh? Old Wil, it's you! Have you come to return your

book?”

“...It still sounds a little odd even though you told me that the nickname symbolizes our friendship. Mr Lin, won't you call me by my name instead?”

“Of course, Mr Wilde.”

“Phew ... That sounds much more comfortable. You had a new customer, Mr Lin?”

“Yeah, Old Wil.”

“My name ... Forget it. I noticed that you loaned the book you seem to be always reading out to the new customer. You must really be really fond of her. Anyway, here's the book I borrowed.”

“A frequently read book is still a book. That book felt just right for her. If I recall correctly, our bet was 30 days. You're back within 20 days, which means that it's my victory. You just wouldn't believe me when I told you that this book is too complicated for older people.”

“... My apologies for doubting your words, I acknowledge my loss. This book is too profound. It's like an enormous world filled with mystical and magical unknowns, transcending the limits of space, time, birth, life, and death. With my inadequate knowledge, I can only imagine that the one who wrote such a monumental work must be a great being.”

“Of course! He was a giant of the literary world that has since passed.”

“A giant? No wonder...” Old Wil's voice trailed off.

Ji Zhixiu's focus fell onto the book and umbrella in her hands.

The conversation between the owner and his regular customer was really casual, probably a result of a deep friendship forged over the years.

However, Ji Zhixiu broke out in cold sweat when she recalled her earlier encounter with that old man.

'Faceless Black-scaled Man', Frank Wilde, A Destructive- rank black magician.

Those dark green snake eyes that manifested from his half-snake-man blood and that black iron mask were his distinctive features.

Despite his kind appearance, this old man had a fearsome reputation. He was known as a cruel murderer whose hands were stained with the blood of thousands.

Once, he clashed with Secret Rite Tower's Ten Great Radiant Knights and destroyed an area spanning a diameter of thousands of kilometers, which led to others recognizing him as a Destructive-rank black magician .

But after that incident, for some unknown reason, he vanished from public view.

In accordance with the Truth Union's stipulated regulation in 1788, extraordinary beings were classified into four grades, and this was known as the 'APDS Classification Law'. Since then, the Truth Union would publish a register of extraordinary beings, as well as changes to their ranks each year.

The APDS classification was as follows:

Abnormal

Pandemonium

Destructive

Supreme

While Wilde's name in the register had since been tagged with the 'whereabouts unknown' and 'Secret Rite Tower offering a reward for his whereabouts' labels, his Destructive-rank status was never changed.

One must know that there were less than ten Destructive-rank beings in the upper level of Capital City Norzin; in fact, there weren't even a hundred of them in the entirety of Azir!

Why did a ruthless black magician who has long vanished appear here?! On top of that, he appears to be on friendly terms with that young man!

Ji Zhixiu took a deep breath before leaving hurriedly.

The owner is an unbelievably powerful and mysterious magician indeed! Perhaps, similar to Wilde, he might be a Destructive-rank! It looks like I've found myself an impressive backing to fall back on this time around...

Lin Jie took the book , ***100 Years Of Solitude*** , and returned it back to the shelf. "Old Wil, you seem to be a little down today."

Wilde could be considered a regular here. Lin Jie's rundown bookstore rarely saw any customers, and the number of regulars could be easily counted with the fingers on his hands. However, Lin Jie had made sure to build up a deeper bond with each of them through his heartfelt engagement, compelling them to visit out of habit.

Wilde first stepped foot into this bookstore two years ago. Since then, he had dropped by a total of five times to borrow new books . It might appear to be infrequent at first glance, but one should note that Wilde's usual borrowing period was a month. In other words, he had devoted 4 out of the 24 months of the two year period here, which was equivalent to a sixth of his time!

That was sincerity!

In the three years Lin Jie had run this bookstore, he practically saw no business in the first. Therefore, Wilde was considered as a veteran regular of his humble place.

At the same time, he was also someone whom Teacher Lin frequently gave guidance and counsel to.

Sigh. Old people, especially empty nesters, are really susceptible to mental and psychological issues.

Old Wil was definitely one such old empty nester.

Based on what Lin Jie had heard , Old Wil had two estranged children and a departed lover . He was excluded by his colleagues and feared by others because of his appearance, leaving him to live a lonely life in the huge city of Norzin .

Old Wil had no lack of food, food, or clothes, but there was a gaping hole in the spiritual aspect of his life.

This deficiency wasn't just due to the lack of concern from friends and family; most importantly, he lacked recognition from peers.

Old Wil was a linguistics expert and an academic with great interest in researching all sorts of rare languages. Those in that field eventually got used to being alone, but the pain of not being understood by others was still a difficult one to bear.

Thus, Lin Jie chose to proceed from this angle!

From the first meeting, Lin Jie made sure to view Old Wil in the eye and treat him with respect so as to win his goodwill. From the books that Old Wil had brought to sell, he managed to deduce quite a bit of information .

In the end, he casually recommended a book — **Wenzhounese** .

Dubbed the “Devil’s Language”, Wenzhounese was considered to be amongst the most difficult languages in China. In the Wenzhou prefecture itself, there were more than 12 different variants of this language. Furthermore, during war time, Wenzhounese was even used as a secret code that enemies had no way of deciphering!

Old Wil’s expression had gone from lackluster to skeptical to fright before becoming consumed with ecstasy as he exclaimed, “Demoniac, this is truly demoniac!” Such a scene made Lin Jie feel the significance of his chicken soup.

The happiness of a life mentor could be as simple and dull as this.

But as there was no Wenzhou nor China in this land known as Azir, Lin Jie could only explain that this book had come from a long-lost place and time >

Chapter 5 Transmigrator Lin Jie

Chapter 5: Transmigrator Lin Jie

Yes, Lin Jie was a transmigrator who had transmigrated from Earth over to this vast country named Azir.

There were countless other transmigrators out there in this vast cosmos but in certain aspects, he was a unique one because his transmigration was, to a certain degree, voluntary.

It all started from Teacher Lin's hobby.

It is common knowledge that youngsters nowadays have weird quirks, ranging from OCD, claustrophobia, all the way to the need to read every single line of text on a shampoo bottle.

Lin Jie was a compulsive book collector. His greatest wish was to collect all the printed books in the world. Regardless of whether he could finish reading all of them, just the thought of having all those hardcover books arranged neatly in shelves was enough to make him hard...

Needless to say, it was impossible for him to take on such a great undertaking on his own. Just China alone had over ninety thousand new books printed every six months. Assuming that each book cost 45 RMB, it would take him a hulking 4 million RMB to purchase all of them! It was financially impossible for him to collect all of the books in China, let alone all of the books in the world!

And this was merely the monetary aspect of the problem.

There were other obstacles such as obtaining out-of-print books, or books that were outright banned. Searching and collecting all these books would require unimaginable time and effort, if even possible at all.

In other words, this was nothing more than Lin Jie's pipe dream.

But it all changed one day when Lin Jie unknowingly discovered a shortcut—a ritual that could realize any wish as long as he paid the price.

Admittedly, Lin Jie was indeed skeptical about the ritual, but he still conducted it out of curiosity and made the wish of obtaining all books in the world.

As soon as he made his wish, he vaguely heard a gentle muttering that he couldn't comprehend. With a short blink, he suddenly found himself in another world, standing before an abandoned bookstore.

There was an inexplicable thought in his mind that told him that his dream of obtaining all of the books in the world could be fulfilled if he entered the bookstore, but the price he had to pay was to never be able to return to Earth anymore.

This was a no-brainer question . The lonesome Lin Jie pushed the bookstore's door open and entered without any hesitation.

Three years had passed since, and Lin Jie had already gotten used to living in Norzin City.

There wasn't much Lin Jie needed to get used to as the technological level in this world was similar to Earth in the 80s and 90s. Language, too, wasn't much of a hindrance as both English and Chinese characters were used here due to historical reasons.

Nevertheless, there were still some differences such as the strange names and crazy hair colors that were common here. Besides these, Lin Jie had also heard rumors of 'inner world' and 'extraordinary beings' existing in this world, though he had yet to see any thus far.

Even up to this point, he still hadn't really felt the price he had to pay for his wish.

And in truth, all of this didn't matter to Lin Jie as he was content with his current life. The bookshelves would be refreshed everyday, and he could easily conduct manual searches and refreshes himself

too. With endless books to read and customers he could mess... dole out chicken soup to, there was nothing else he could ask for.

"I've recently reached a bottleneck in my research, " Wilde remarked with his raspy voice. "I found a new direction thanks to you loaning Devil's Language out to me two years ago. However, I need more clues and documents on similar languages."

Is it some sort of inside joke amongst academics to call a proper book the Devil's Language? , Lin Jie wondered as he walked over to the counter and wrote the word 'Returned' in one of the columns.

"Am I right to say that you wish to borrow a similar type of book?" asked Lin Jie as he tapped the pen on the counter top.

"The previous book was too profound for me. I t felt like a small part of a whole. Do you have something more detailed... It would be best if it has the context of the language too. The previous book had too many influences from other languages and all sorts of customs, making it very complex . I need to better understand the meanings within, " muttered Wilde.

After two years, he had finally found clues regarding forbidden curses in that book. This could very well be an opportunity for him to ascend to Supreme-rank!

Magicians were adept at crafting spells through the power of languages and characters. Black magicians utilized verbal languages in chanted curses, whereas white magicians made use of characters to inscribe sigils.

As a top-notch black magician, Wilde had already mastered most basic incantations. What he needed now was to draw out his inner soul's potential to spur a breakthrough. In other words, he needed to find the voice of his own soul.

A black magician's final calling was to create a language that belonged solely to himself!

That was the path he had to take to reach Supreme-rank.

"Is that so... Please wait a moment while I find something suitable,"

replied Lin Jie.

Wilde nodded and went to browse the shelves behind him.

Old Wil's request makes sense. Even though the languages in this world are similar to that of Earth, the differences in culture and customs still leads to some degree of divergence as these are two different worlds. It would be difficult for him to thoroughly understand Chinese culture. I should find some books with a more general research scope for him.

Lin Jie's forefinger slowly skimmed through the bookshelf before suddenly coming to a halt.

While Lin Jie was choosing a book, Wilde gazed out at the gloomy downpour outside the store as he thought about the past.

It was two years ago, when he was in the midst of escaping after being defeated by Joseph, that he stumbled upon this bookstore and met Lin Jie. Lin Jie offered him guidance and pointed another path out to him.

Even to this day, he couldn't stop his heart from racing and his body from trembling whenever he thought about the book that contained the language of devils, as well as the amazing mysticism and power infused in it.

A sensation akin to a first love!

It reminded him of the time when he first witnessed the power of a magician while he was still a student .

“Die.”

All it took was a single word from his aged teacher to extinguish the life of the beautiful bird fluttering before them.

Amazement and shock!

These were Wilde's first thoughts as his goals and beliefs became conviction!

The present day Wilde was a far cry from the egoistic person he was

a few years ago. And this change was brought about by this selfless, all-knowing bookstore owner.

Wilde had never asked about Lin Jie's past or identity, but in truth, he already had an answer in his heart.

He's definitely a reclusive scholar of the Truth Union!

He even suspected Lin Jie to be the fabled Supreme-rank great sage who possessed the key to the Truth Shrine... However, this was nothing more than a conjecture he came up with, and he had never sensed any changes in the aether coming from Lin Jie either.

Wilde cast his thoughts aside upon seeing the young man pull out a book from a shelf. "You've found it?"

Lin Jie cleared his throat and handed the book over with a smile. "It might sound presumptuous, but my gut feeling tells me that this book is right for you. To be honest, I'm quite confident in my research in this field..."

"?"

The slight embarrassment coming from Lin Jie puzzled Wilde. He received the book from Lin Jie and took a glance at its cover. Lin Jie's eyes also followed his gaze toward the printed title and author.

Ceremonies And Customs

Lin Jie

Chapter 6 Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies

Chapter 6: Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies

Chapter 6: Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies

“Ahh! W-was this written by you?”

Wilde’s expression changed. He had originally been holding the book carefully but now, his actions were even gentler, as if he was dealing with a piece of fragile glass.

Lin Jie’s words were clearly printed there and in retrospect, all that had been said was clearly him recommending his own work.

Wilde glanced at the printed title, *Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies*. He raised his head and asked with caution. “Is this your area of research? Rites and ceremonies?”

Rites and ceremonies are easy to understand while Corpse Devouring Sect... This sounds like a certain religion ... but I've never heard of it before.

There were three main faiths in Azir:

With knowledge as their conviction, the Truth Union.

Worshippers of the Moon, the Church of the Dome.

Believers of the Imprisoned Fog, the Church of Pestilence.

There are also other scattered religions that were rather obscure, but as a magician who wandered around and did jobs as a hired hand for various factions, Wilde would still know a little about them, yet, the Corpse Devouring Sect didn’t ring any bells.

This sounds like the religion of a demonic tribe that eats humans. But if it isn't, that would mean...

Wilde felt his heart shudder.

Scholars and academics tended to be lawfully good and all this time, Wilde reckoned that Lin Jie would at the very least be neutral. That had been the reason why he didn't dare divulge too much of his own identity nor talk about his past.

The charity of these sorts of higher beings was usually temporary so neither could he be certain that this bookstore owner wasn't just running an experiment out of boredom to "talk a ruthless black magician into being good."

There might be unimaginable consequences if Wilder were to go against the wishes of this higher being.

However, this book written by Lin Jie had a sinister vibe. Without a doubt, the author was aligned with evil.

A formidable scholar that researches taboo issues was bound to be eliminated by the mainstream. Is this the reason for him being a recluse?! With a pounding heart, Wilde looked towards Lin Jie, who didn't mind curious gazes from customers and with a gentle smile he nodded with reminiscence. "Yes, this is a part of my research tasks that also changed my fate..."

"Never mind, it's something that happened a long time ago. There isn't any reason to dig it up all over again." Lin Jie sighed.

A long time ago? Fate-changing?

An outrageous conjecture popped up in Wilde's mind, however, he noticed Lin Jie's expression and thus turned his attention to the slightly coarse book cover. "This book seems to be hand-binded," he remarked.

Lin Jie nodded. "Back then, I wasn't able to get it published due to unforeseen circumstances and could only retain this book which I hand-printed. I've decided to lend this book to you since we are kindred spirits. Of course, if you do not trust me, I can recommend you other books too!"

Before his transmigration, Lin Jie was a cultural studies doctorate

student as well as a lecturer. There was a history behind the “Teacher Lin” title. Furthermore, providing life advice and doling out chicken soup for the soul wasn’t something he learned overnight.

If Lin Jie hadn’t chosen to transmigrate back then, he would likely be an associate professor and would have probably published the sixth edition of his books about popular customs.

While it wouldn’t be especially outstanding given the many other “youngest associate professors” and “genius students”, he was confident in his specialization.

“Thank you. It is my greatest honor to read your work.” Wilde bowed slightly and continued. “However, having the only copy of such an important book in the hands of a pathetic old man leaves me uneasy.”

As a crafty old magician, Wilde wasn’t worried about losing the book. However, this was a book that hadn’t been published which meant that all the things recorded inside were of an experimental nature.

Who knew what sort of unimaginable outcome might occur because of him studying it?

From the look of things, it seems as though Lin Jie took him as some sort of guinea pig...

“Old Wil, there’s nothing to be worried about. I believe that you would bring this book even more worth. My research only has value when it is seen by others.”

“As for it being the only copy? That’s no longer important to me.” Lin Jie smiled and gestured at the bookshelf behind him. “I now possess an entire forest. Besides, I can easily produce a replacement anytime. Knowledge in one’s mind cannot be stolen while fame and fortune can be taken. But, in my opinion, those are just immaterial.”

Lin Jie looked intently at Wilde.

Accept it, Old Wil! This is already the last of my chicken soup!

Lin Jie could sense Old Wil's apprehension towards his research. However, this wasn't directed at the subject but rather, concern over what studying this might bring about.

As an empty nester, Old Wil might seem amiable, but his haughty and detached disposition had caused him to drift away from friends and family. As a result, he regarded academics with great importance.

He needed accomplishment, fame, and fortune of this aspect to fill the void in his heart!

However, this was a morbid and bigoted mentality which distance himself further from society. Therefore, Lin Jie decided to guide him towards once again experiencing care and concern from others!

Wilde met Lin Jie's gaze and was momentarily startled. He took off his hat and said, "I've benefited from your advice."

His fingers holding the hat were trembling.

Fame and fortune are immaterial... Is this a warning to not divulge any of this information to others? He must have sensed that I've figured out his identity.

The black magician's heart grew heavier.

Lin Jie then continued. "Anyway, back to the topic. Since you could understand, cough, the devil's language, you should be able to understand this book, and if you think that it's good, I would be more than happy if you recommend it to others."

He revealed a polite smile that seemed full of hidden meanings.

Gazing at the book in his hand, Wilde nodded. "Understood, I will do my utmost."

It seems that he wants me to help propagate his work. This must be the price I have to pay.

Wilde felt his heart lighten.

There was a price to pay after all. Free lunches didn't exist in this world.

Wilde would have been even more terrified had Lin Jie continued with his generosity as it would mean a heavier price to pay in future, perhaps eventually costing him his life.

Propagating the contents of this book but never divulging the identity of the author... It seems like the only way to go about it is to first study the contents and pass it on to others verbally. I must be very prudent. Wilde thought to himself.

“Well then, I should take my leave.”

Wilde put his hat back on, then hesitated for a moment before drawing out a jet-black stone sculpture from his chest pocket and placing it on the counter-top.

“Thanks for the guidance you have given me all this time. Please accept this small token of appreciation >

Chapter 7 Gargoyle

Chapter 7: Gargoyle

“Is this... a gargoyle?”

Lin Jie picked up the sculpture and observed it.

The stone sculpture was approximately 30 centimeters tall and 10 centimeters wide. A third of the sculpture was a pedestal while the remainder was the body of the gargoyle itself, a monster that was part human and part beast, with two horns on its head, a tail with a pointed end and a pair of bat-like wings which made it appear like the spawn of the devil.

I really have no idea how Old Wil managed to hide it in his clothes ,
mused Lin Jie to himself.

He could tell that the cost of this sculpture wasn't cheap given its detailed and exquisite craftsmanship, which, together with the eerie red glow from its eyes, made it seem as if it was about to come to life at any moment.

For a moment, Lin Jie's heart pounded and he felt something wasn't right.

How scary!!

Fortunately, the rough texture of stone reminded Lin Jie that this was merely a sculpture.

“Yes,” Wilde nodded.

“I know that it's nothing precious, and it can't compare to the help you have given me thus far, but please accept this as a sign of my gratitude. I'll bring an even more valuable gift next time I return.”

Lin Jie's first thought was to reject the gift out of habit, but after some consideration, he realized that his Asian modesty wasn't appropriate here. He could tell that Old Wil sincerely wanted him

to have this gift, and rejecting it would make it seem like he didn't like it or that they weren't close enough.

Besides, a gargoyle was similar to those Chinese stone tablets that warded off evil, relaying Old Wil's blessings and kind intentions to him.

There was no reason to reject it, so Lin Jie decided to accept this "local specialty".

Lin Jie placed it back on the counter-top and smiled.

"A fine piece of art indeed .I like it! I'm really looking forward to what you will bring me next!"

Wilde heaved a relieved sigh.

He had kept this gargoyle with him for many years, and it was also his graduation piece back when he finished his apprenticeship with his own master. Of all his creations, this stone gargoyle was his best piece, crafted using the vestiges of an extinct sect from the ancient times as raw material, and it was infused with the blood, souls, and vitality of 990 people.

Hard skin impervious to swords and spears, teeth and claws that could rip a person to shreds, and powerful wings granting it speed and flexibility; the gargoyle was definitely not a creature to be made light of. It could even sense killing intent. On the whole, its fighting prowess was comparable to a Pandemonium-rank warrior.

Wilde had achieved a high level of mastery in magical object creation. At first, he was still pleased at the opportunity to display his work to Lin Jie, but when he heard the words "piece of art", his delight thoroughly vanished and he snapped back to reality.

Indeed, this is merely a Pandemonium-rank gargoyle. Any random book sitting on his shelf is easily worth thousands of such gargoyles! It really seems that my gift is no big deal in the eyes of a higher being. Haaaaa... Lin Jie is truly kind, paying heed to my feelings and praising it from another angle. But it's fine!

Wilde had already prepared the next gift, and it would be an

absolutely heavyweight one. He believed that even a Supreme-rank being would value it!

“You will be pleased,” the old man remarked with a twinkle in his eyes before turning and leaving the bookstore.

Lin Jie waved him off and sighed.

This should be all the business for today , Lin Jie thought to himself as he watched the pouring rain outside. Getting two customers in this vile weather was already a rare occurrence and Lin Jie wouldn't pine for even more.

“Maintaining a good attitude does bring about more luck,” Lin Jie murmured with a sigh before sipping on his tea. He picked up the gargoyle and toyed with it for a bit before placing it back on the counter top.

Under the dusky light, that genuinely demonic sculpture atop its pedestal seemed like it was ready to spread its wings and hunt at any moment.

Oddly enough, this stone gargoyle fits the bookstore rather well. With such a thought in mind, he rotated the gargoyle in a way so that the malevolent red glow from its eyes faced the entrance. Anyone who attempted to break into the bookstore would surely be scared witless by it, even if it was broad daylight.

An anti-theft mechanism, wonderful!!

Lin Jie nodded in satisfaction before he began to tidy up the counter.

As he was putting away the tea cups, his eyes suddenly narrowed.

He noticed that the wet spots on the tabletop were flowing slowly on their own accord, gathering together to form the words—“It's been a while.”

Lin Jie shot up in shock, his eyes still firmly fixated on the table as a familiar sensation washed over him. This was the same sensation he felt when he was brought before the bookstore three years ago.

He understood at once; the hidden hand that had sent him to this world had once again appeared after three years!

“It’s you!” Lin Jie calmed himself with deep breaths and sat down once again.

“It has been a long time indeed... Have you finally decided on the price I ought to pay?”

Lin Jie couldn’t help airing his grievances.

“Speaking of which, don’t you think it’s too much that you brought me here all of a sudden before I could make sense of what’s going on? If not for some richer customers supporting my bookstore, I would have starved to death a long time ago!”

“Are you some sort of devil? The kind whom people sell their souls to?”

The wet spots formed a “ No “.

“Yeah, I thought so too. Devils aren’t this negligent,” Lin Jie grumbled.

In mythology, devils always did their utmost to exploit their contractors so as to maximize their gains.

“Forget it, let’s get straight to the point. What do you need me to do?” demanded Lin Jie. He sat upright with crossed arms, watching the water stains on the counter top.

He didn’t mind paying the price he ought to, even if it came three years late.

Firstly, Lin Jie himself regarded the fulfillment of contractual agreements with importance. Even though conditions for their deal hadn’t been set clearly, his dream had indeed become a reality.

Enjoying a bonus three years before the agreement was established was already a win for him. Furthermore, this entity that had been summoned by a ceremony had a rather mild disposition. Lin Jie reckoned that it might be some sort of “benevolent spirit” like the

genie from Aladdin's enchanted lamp.

Following that, Lin Jie watched in surprise as the water stains formed, *"You have already accomplished it. I have awakened."*

All sorts of thoughts swarmed Lin Jie's mind. "So, after granting me my wish, you've been in slumber for the past three years until I did a certain task, granting you some... energy or something that allowed you to finally awaken?"

"Yes."

"..." Lin Jie drummed his fingers on the table.

"Was it because I asked Old Wil to recommend my book to others?"

"Yes."

"So... this is the price I must pay? To have others recommend and propagate my own books?"

"Yes. "

"Does this benefit you?"

"Yes."

Only

Good, it's straightforward and concise.

"Haa... there's absolutely no problem then! I will work hard." Lin Jie pledged solemnly.

Following that, the water spots on the table top disappeared instantly, leaving no trace of this exchange ever happening.

Shortly after Wilde's silhouette disappeared into the rain, a hooded figure peered out from a dark alley, eagle eyes fixed in the direction that Wilde had disappeared in as he pulled out a cellphone.

Aether revolved in the air, creating a barrier that prevented sound from escaping.

“This is Jack reporting, I’ve spotted ‘Faceless Black-scaled Man’ Wilde at Norzin 23rd Avenue. I suspected that he’s involved in the hunter’s internal conflict.”

“Moreover, he stopped at a bookstore for an hour. I suspect that the bookstore might be a secret base for black magicians.”

Chapter 8 Joseph

Chapter 8: Joseph

Knock knock!

“Chief, I’ve received a report.”

Joseph looked up from his documents and saw the golden haired youngster standing at the door.

“Come in, Claude.” As he said that, Joseph put down his pen, removed his glasses and rubbed his nose. “Did something happen with regards to the Magic Ovum Mirror incident? These hunters...”

The old man got up, eyeing the pile of files on his desk. He took a deep breath, then roared, “....are simply the vermin of Norzin!”

Joseph looked like a refined elderly gentleman when seated. But when he stood up, the bulging muscles of his huge frame seemed like they were about to burst out of his clothes. An unwavering look of resolve on his face and that grizzled white hair gave him a daunting aura.

Claude waved to the people outside before gently closing the door and entering. “Sorry teacher, it’s a new development.”

“A new development? What kind of development can be even more important than the bunch of retarded morons that only know how to bark and cause trouble?!”

In a fit of rage, Joseph knocked on the desk lightly and a crackling sound of metal sounded from his mechanical arm.

With a loud bang, a crack appeared on the desk as it shook. “Bullshit! I would already be enjoying retirement if not for these bunch of motherless bastards! Goddamn it! One day I’ll piss on all their mother’s graves!”

Claude’s lips twitch and he couldn’t help speaking up. “Teacher,

you've to mind your image..."

Joseph huffed, "What's there to be afraid of?" He casted a glance behind Claude. "Haven't you already closed the door?"

Claude: "... *What's with this reasoning after spouting all that bullshit?*

"Alright," Claude scratched his head helplessly and placed the file he held onto the desk. "The informant tracking the hunter situation reported that Wilde was sported on 23rd Avenue..."

"Who?!" Joseph's eyes were shooting lasers as his expression turned grave.

"Wilde, Frank Wilde, the 'Faceless Black-scaled Man'. Deemed as a Destructive-rank black magician by the Truth Union. Disappeared two years ago after the battle at the White Hills. We currently have a bounty for him with the reward increased every year and that causes a great deal of opposition within Secret Rite Tower."

Claude had already expected this sort of reaction from his teacher and gave out his report precisely.

Joseph sneered, "He's finally appeared once more. I thought that scum would have remained in the sewers shivering forever."

Claude muttered, "But you were the one who was insistent he was alive and kept raising the bounty because you firmly believed he would reappear..."

"Of course! No one knows him better than I do." Joseph looked down at his metal hand that had been completely furnished by the Truth Union. A jarring metallic screech echoed as his fingers formed a fist.

He had lost his right arm in the battle two years ago. But at the same time, he had destroyed at least half of Wilde's body. Many people reckoned that Wilde was already dead but Joseph had a premonition that this fella would definitely return!

"I never expected him to be in Norzin. The most dangerous place is the safest, huh? Seems like he has made progress. Hopefully he now

has more than just water in that walnut-sized brain of his.”

“What’s he doing on 23rd Avenue?” Joseph asked as he pressed his hands against the desk.

Claude answered at once. “According to the report, he entered an ordinary looking bookstore and stayed for over an hour, as if he was buying or borrowing some books.”

“A black magician that gains power from language buying books? Preposterous! Surely there’s something wrong with that bookstore. Have you investigated it?”

“I’ve already done so. This bookstore is listed under the Ash Chamber of Commerce and has been in operation for three years. While it has little customers and business, the store has a favorable reputation and the owner being an out-of-townee is the only anomaly. Initially, we had suspected that this might be a hideout for black magicians but we aren’t too sure now.”

“What aren’t you unsure of?”

With a slight degree of difficulty, Claude answered, “The Ash Chamber of Commerce belongs to the druids... believers of nature and forests. It’s highly unlikely for them to associate with black magicians. The druids might lodge a report towards Secret Rite Tower if we proceed recklessly and harm the Ash Chamber of Commerce’s reputation.”

Joseph slammed a palm on the desk. “This bunch of shit...vegetable eating troublemakers!”

“Uh, druids aren’t vegetarian...”

“Whatever! Goddamn it! Anybody can be an accomplice of the dark and the mission of us knights is to eliminate the darkness! Do you think that Wilde spent an entire hour inside the bookstore chatting, reading and drinking tea?” Joseph went on a furious tirade. “My beloved disciple Claude, do you really think a diabolical black magician full of schemes and actively plotting revenge would be inside an ordinary bookstore, reading?!”

"I shall really put on this pair of pointy end boots and viciously kick your ass if that's what you really think!"

Claude was subjected to this torrent of abuse and didn't dare to retort. All he could do was say mockingly, "But teacher, the Ash Chamber of Commerce provides our intelligence branch with 40% of its expenditure."

"..."

Joseph's face stiffened and he took two deep breaths. He then strode forward from his desk, putting on a necktie and a coat. His huge frame coupled with these clothes could be aptly described as a "western-styled mobster".

"Whatever, I'll make a trip to 23rd Avenue to personally see what a shit place it is!" growled Joseph.

"Yes, teacher," Claude lowered his head and opened the door.

Joseph strode out the door and headed to the elevators. People passing by the interior walkways in Secret Rite Tower would greet Joseph when they saw him.

"Afternoon, knight chief."

"Radiant knight sir."

"Section chief."

"How are you?"

Abraham Joseph.

One of the ten Radiant Knights of Secret Right Tower. Or rather, former Radiant Knight.

The battle at the White Hills had severely injured Wilde who was forced into hiding. Joseph too, suffered great damage to body and spirit, entering a state of semi-retirement and transferring to intelligence work in Secret Rite Tower.

Only

“Haaa...”

Joseph pressed a button in the central elevator and it started to descend slowly.

Secret Rite Tower was a tower over three hundred meters in height. Office districts and pathways packed like honeycombs formed a huge and tight setup.

Intelligence branch, training branch, combat branch, logistics branch.

Since ancient times, knights possessing elemental powers had been striving to cleanse the world of evil.

Forty nine large elevators in the center rose and descended all the time, carrying the weights of thousands of workers each day.

“Let me sort what sort of hallowed being you are... Lin Jie.” Joseph muttered as he stuffed the report into his pocket as the elevator doors slowly opened.

Suddenly, he covered his eyes. “Damn it, the hallucinations are back...”

Chapter 9 Hunters Never Turn Back

Chapter 9: Hunters Never Turn Back

“Haa... Haa...”

Taking deep breaths, Joseph staggered as he held the wall for support and finally pulled himself together thanks to the chilling wind and rain hitting him.

Pathways in the surrounding areas were already flooded and there was nobody else around. Continuous storm warnings had already resulted in a tenth of Norzin city's ordinary folks evacuating to safe areas.

23rd Avenue would have probably become an empty street and this was in part due to Secret Rite Tower's covert operations and direction.

All because these foolish hunters had brought a Magic Ovum Mirror into Norzin City. Now they had an internal conflict, the Magic Ovum Mirror was lost and this made Norzin citizens uneasy.

Perhaps in the near future, an unknown dream beast might burst out from a fracture of the Dream Realm, bringing along blood and fire.

The throbbing pain in Joseph's head gradually subsided and the whispers in his ears ceased. Joseph stared at his hands and grimaced.

Besides losing his arm and the many internal injuries he suffered, there was a more important reason for Joseph's retirement from the Radiant Knights.

He had been the wielder of the demon sword, Candela. Due to its first owner's lunacy and death, this strange ancient sword had a

curse to turn people insane. Only a strong, upright knight with perfect spirit and will could master this curse.

In the past, Joseph had been such a powerful knight. But now, riddled with age and a handicap, he had since lost that right.

With the next successor of Candela yet to be found, Joseph could only continue to suffer the backlash of this demon sword.

In the late of night, Joseph would always see huge shadows floating about within the city and hear Candela's crazed muttering. These visions had intensified recently, leaving Joseph greatly tortured.

Before a towering, abandoned church stood Ji Zhixiu, cane in hand. Her black windbreaker flapped furiously in the wind as she gazed at the rising flames through the church's round glass windows.

Anguished cries and screams came from within as glass windows were smashed in succession. The aether fluctuated chaotically in this bloody scene.

Shimmering glass shards, mixed with innards and fresh blood were sprayed like vines across the church walls. Corpses were piled up in heaps, rapidly carbonizing and turning to ashes.

Behind Ji Zhixiu were her most loyal subordinates as of now. Kaiyi, Marcus and Ruen.

As the second leader of the hunter group "White Wolves", Ji Zhixie's subordinates numbered more than these three originally. However, she had suffered this unpardonable betrayal and other than the three who surrendered, the remaining ones had already become corpses.

In its larval state before developing, the Magic Ovum Mirror possessed the ability to beguile a person, planting heinous thoughts of coveting it.

From the moment the first person with clouded judgment appeared, the situation had become irreversible. Now, Norzin's rain-stop had

become the battleground of the hunters.

Kaiyi and Marcus had already been her subordinates, as well as being followers of her father. Their consciousness had already been binded by her family's white magician's sigil, thus allowing them to retain their mental clarity against the Magic Ovum Mirror's erosion.

On the other hand, Ruen had only surrendered recently and allowed himself to be branded with the sigil willingly. In the hunter group "White Wolves", he had been a subordinate of the first leader, Heris.

His reason for surrender was simple. He had witnessed the ruthless methods, hellbent revenge and the pile of corpses in the wake of Ji Zhixiu's "Beast Mutation" state.

"Miss, we have already ascertained that the Magic Ovum Mirror is in Heris' hands. He has already turned into a deranged maniac and carried out a massacre within the hunter group after seizing the mirror," Kaiyi said softly.

With the nickname "Black Rose", Kaiyi was a tall, slender lady with beautiful features. Her figure was accentuated in a feminine blouse, tight fitting trousers and high cut boots. Coupled with the row of accessories on her earlobe and thick black lip gloss, she looked like any ordinary fashionable teen.

However, the saw-tooth sword in her hand, still glistening with blood begged to differ. She was a hunter that hunted dream beasts and also a cold-blooded killer.

She surveyed the chapel with a worrying gaze. "Heris has joined forces with the third leader Kaji. I fear we lack sufficient strength and this assault might end in failure."

Marcus nodded and chimed in, "Heris is strong. He is the closest to Pandemonium-rank amongst us White Wolves. Kaji is slightly weaker, but nearly half of the hunters in the organization were trained up by him. Even many people had thoughts of defecting because of Heris' insanity, there are still many who follow them. Our chances of victory are slight."

Ruen eyed Ji Zhixiu fearfully before flashing a flattering smile. “Although leader... no, Heris’ faction is powerful, our boss isn’t bad either! He’s merely close to Pandemonium-rank but our boss is a genuine one! As long as beast mutation is used, even Heris and Kaji would fall by her blade!”

Even though Ruen didn’t truly know what rank Ji Zhixiu was at, kissing ass was still a must. He didn’t know how a hunter could maintain one’s rationality with such a high level of beast mutation but strength was still strength. He had to admit that he was an opportunist who stood on the side of who was strongest. This was the way of the world.

Of course, it would be even better if he could one day obtain the method of controlling the sordid blood.

Shing!

Ji Zhixiu flicked her cane, unveiling a sharp blade. “Hunters never turn back. Come, let’s enter. This will be the final battle.”

This abandoned church was built by the Church of Pestilence. The Church of Pestilence had once been the top faith in Azir, but as the Truth Union rose rapidly and usurped its position, many of their chapels became abandoned.

The battle in the church was reaching its conclusion and hunters’ remains were strewn all over. Ji Zhixiu disposed of the last person obstructing her and strode into the main hall.

Beneath the eaves of the chapel, lit by the light shining through the seven colored stained glass was the White Wolves’ third leader, Kaji. He was a tall man, dressed in black clergyman robes and had a long sickle strapped to his back. His head was bent down, as though in prayer.

Rainwater dripped through the long neglected ceiling, covering the floor in puddles.

“Where is Heris?” Marcus asked.

“Gak...” Kaji’s head moved slightly and he produced a sputtering

sound.

“Something’s wrong!” Ji Zhixiu’s eyes narrowed as she rushed forward and gave a push to the man’s shoulder.

Kaji’s head tilted back, revealing his pained twisted face and a huge gash on his neck dripping with blood.

Everyone else gasped. That huge sickle wasn’t strapped to his back but had run through his body, nailing him to the floorboards instead.

“Injection! Hurry!” Ji Zhixiu cried out.

“Yes!” Marcus hurriedly handed over an injection of sordid blood. Ji Zhixiu grabbed it, then stabbed it into Kaji’s heart and injected all of it.

The large quantity of sordid blood took effect at once as Kaji’s neck wound started to squirm and shrink. At the same time, his eyeballs spun wildly before finally turning into beastly pupils.

“Urgh urgh...”

Kaiji yelled out in pain as teeth and nails grew long and hair rapidly sprouted throughout his body

“Answer me! Where is Heris! Has he left with the Magic Ovum Mirror?!” Ji Zhixiu’s stared into his eyes and shouted.

Only

Kaji nodded then threw his head back, roaring with laughter. “He will descend...”

His eyes then slackened and turned motionless.

Coarse fur that had shot up from his heart once again went back in, taking along the last vestiges of his life.

“Goddamn it!” Ji Zhixiu pounded a fist against the wall, eyeing the disarrayed main hall.

“Miss, how about going to see Mr. Haywood? He might not reject providing help since he is supported by the family,” suggested Marcus.

“No need. You guys continue the search.” Ji Zhixiu took a deep long breath. “Ruen, come with me.”

Ruen was slightly taken aback and asked apprehensively, “Where... where to?”

“23rd Avenue.”

Chapter 10 You Failed?

Chapter 10: You Failed?

“Yet another lackluster day of business,” sighed Lin Jie as he poured himself a cup of tea before starting to read.

Days without any business was just but a common occurrence in Lin Jie’s daily life. Three days had gone by since the day Old Wil and the affluent young miss came by. There hadn’t been any customers during this period.

It was easy to lose track of time with the unceasing rainstorm outside. Only a handful of people came out to buy reserve foodstuffs in this gloomy weather that shrouded the entire city.

The pitter-patter of rain and gushing water were the only sounds in the quiet streets. Water level in the roads had already risen to about ten centimeters high but fortunately, 23rd Avenue was situated on slightly higher ground.

According to the news, residents of more than thirty streets in Norzin had already been temporarily evacuated to other districts. Such abnormal weather had only happened a handful of times in the history of Norzin.

However, for Lin Jie, life went on as per normal, the only difference was needing to put on a jacket because of the colder weather.

He didn’t need to worry about food because he had three months of reserves. A reserve generator meant that Lin Jie didn’t have to concern himself with power.

Moreover, boredom wasn’t an issue here.

This was a depository with all the books in the world. Lin Jie wouldn’t be able to finish reading them all even if he possessed a quantum reading speed, much less now where he studied the books meticulously and made notes.

While Lin Jie wasn't born with a compulsive reading disorder, hoarding books had more or less caused him to develop this habit over the years. Such a life was simply heavenly for a severe homebody like Lin Jie... just that he didn't have much money.

"Ah, but it's all thanks to that little dark-skinned lady that I'm able to lead such a meager yet fulfilling life right now. If not for her support of the bookstore and assistance in helping me get an operation license and temporary residence permit, I really have no idea where I would be now," mused Lin Jie to himself.

As Lin Jie flipped the page, he murmured with a tinge of disappointment, "She hasn't visited the store in a long time."

All those past customers seemed like very busy people. Despite their good relationship with Lin Jie, there were rather prolonged periods between their visits. Frequent customers like Old Wil were few and far between.

One such example was his very first customer, Qili, a young dark skinned lady with snow-white hair.

Qili had been in poor spirits from being bullied in school when she first wandered into this bookstore. At that time, Lin Jie had given her some counsel and recommended a book— *Nonviolent Communication*. Ever since that time, Lin Jie had yet to see her return.

Haa... She's probably busy with her studies. But given that she could get my unlicensed shop registered right away and sponsoring a significant amount of money means that she's probably an affluent young miss just like Ji Zhixiu.

There hadn't been any customers in this horrendous weather for the past few days and the strange, unknown entity didn't reappear again after showing its presence that day. After finally getting a sense of his calling as a transmigrator, Lin Jie started to feel like an idle person again.

Over the past three days, Lin Jie had dug out all his past works and gone over them. After all, with the mission of propagating his own

books , Lin Jie would need to properly think about how best to advocate them.

Promoting academic works like these is a tough task. There are just so few people that have specialization like Old Wil. Lin Jie brooded.

A muffled chime from the bronze bell at the door suddenly sounded. Lin Jie was in deep thought and called out casually, "Welcome."

Lin Jie closed the book and looked up, finally noticing the arrival being Ji Zhixiu who had first come by a few days earlier. He was slightly stunned at first, but quickly put on a professional smile.

Speak of the devil. Another repeat customer appears just as I was reminiscing about Old Wil. Hasn't it only been three days? Is the business of my bookstore finally changing for the better? This lady may very well be a bringer of good fortune, I have to nurture her properly.

Lin Jie's smile widened with this thought in mind. "Ah, it's Miss Zhixiu. My shabby bookstore has never seen a customer return within such a short time. You are the first!"

Ji Zhixiu bit her lip, as she suddenly felt a wave of shame wash over her.

She should have resolved the whole matter in one shot having received such powerful guidance but yet, here she was running back to seek help midway through.

Am i the most useless one amongst all his "customers"?

She could sense that the bookstore owner wasn't mocking her. Instead, he had on an encouraging and concerned smile, as if trying to spur on a child.

But this caused Ji Zhixiu to feel even more pathetic and embarrassed.

"I'm sorry to have disappointed you," Ji Zhixiu abashedly murmured as she made her way to the counter and sat down.

Her attention immediately went to the sculpture on the counter top, nearly causing her to jump. *A magician's gargoyle?*

That evil and devilish black sculpture was indeed a gargoyle that magicians used.

Although Ji Zhixiu didn't sense any fluctuations in the aether coming from gargoyle. It was just as un-daunting as this ordinary looking bookstore had been in the beginning. However, the owner had then brought out ***Blood and Beast***, a book full of mystery. This bookstore definitely possessed something, just that it was hidden too well.

"Boss, is this where you wanted to bring me?" Ruen pushed open the door and entered, surveying the place suspiciously. "A bookstore?"

His gaze then went to Lin Jie behind the counter— *An ordinary person?*

However, he didn't say it aloud and kept the suspicions to himself because he noticed Ji Zhixiu's respectful attitude.

Only

Lin Jie was pleasantly surprised. *You brought along someone?*

He glanced at Ji Zhixiu and asked, "This is?"

Ji Zhixiu nervously gestured for Ruen to keep silent and wondered if the owner was displeased that she brought someone else.

"This is a subordinate of mine. Please don't worry, he is absolutely devoted to me," she replied.

Lin Jie cast a sympathetic look at Ji Zhixiu and nodded.

Poor thing, having to use a "devoted" label to introduce someone after freeing herself from the shadow of a scumbag... Wait a moment, she shouldn't be this devoid of self-confidence if she had thoroughly given that scumbag tit for tat. Furthermore, she did say "sorry to have disappointed you".

Lin Jie observed Ji Zhixiu a little more closely and noticed the ashamed look in her eyes.

Then, he crossed his arms and said solemnly, “You failed?”

Chapter 11 Love Is A Battlefield

Chapter 11: Love Is A Battlefield

“You failed?”

The bookstore owner said with seemingly reproach, as he sat up straight and gazed at Ji Zhixiu.

Ji Zhixiu took a deep breath and nodded, muttering with anger and disappointment. “Yes, I failed...He escaped, with his current whereabouts unknown. I’ve already sent people to search for him but they haven’t found any clues yet.”

This situation seems kinda serious , Lin Jie frowned as he thought to himself.

He had specifically done an online search on Ji Bonong and his Rolle Resource Development Company over the past few days. Lin Jie had heard of the company prior to this and knew that it was a large company that monopolized Norzin’s lower district resource development sector and had many subsidiary brands including jewelry, cosmetics and foodstuff under its banner.

After researching, Lin Jie found out that this company appeared to have some tight relations with Norzin’s administration. The company didn’t just monopolize the lower district’s resources, it had the only rights to recruitment of people in the lower district.

Besides this company, coming into contact with lower district personnel was strictly prohibited for others. The greatest punishment for offenders was life imprisonment and even their family would be banished to becoming followers of the Church of Pestilence.

The uniqueness of Rolle Resource Development Company could be seen from all this information. And Bonong’s only daughter, Ji Zhixiu, was undoubtedly a high-born and aloof young lady.

Such a lady with a grand background and numerous suitors had actually been cheated this badly by a scumbag. Furthermore, she didn't seem like a weak person herself. Thus, Lin Jie determined that the man must have been in quite a high position himself. There might also have been criminal accomplices involved which resulted in Ji Zhixiu unable to find him and enact her revenge.

Indeed, there's definitely something criminal involved!

In Lin Jie's opinion, such a scumbag aiming to cheat a girl's feelings and fortune wasn't any ordinary swindler!

He put on a reassuring smile and pushed a cup of hot tea across. "Calm down, don't worry. Tell me what you've done to him these past few days?"

Clearly, this young lady before him had suffered a setback, causing her to doubt herself. Lin Jie knew that it wasn't an appropriate time to put on a strict stance.

Previously, he had used "compelling" words to urge on Ji Zhixiu's resolve for revenge. But now, he felt it was best to pacify her first.

That scumbag running away meant that Ji Zhixiu's act of revenge was a significant success, however, his escape led to Ji Zhixiu's resolve being slightly shaken.

Still, this wasn't something too worrying. Given the power of her family, it was quite improbable for the scumbag to thoroughly disappear and the current situation was merely temporary.

Now, Ji Zhixiu seemed to be clutching at straws by coming to seek out Lin Jie for guidance. But from a different aspect, this was also a good thing.

It meant she had already become reliant on Lin Jie's chicken soup. Lin Jie would be able to help stabilize this customer's mental state as long as he worked on it a little more!

The strategy Lin Jie employed now was to have Ji Zhixiu recall each step of her revenge plan and from there, gradually relieve herself of the distress and regain her self-belief once more.

Ji Zhixiu's heart missed a beat when he noticed the bookstore owner's creased brows.

Oh no, is it because of my failure? Will he choose another person instead? Anxious thoughts rapidly flooded Ji Zhixiu's mind, making her feel even more panicked than when Heris had escaped.

Fortunately for her, Lin Jie's smile returned soon after and he had poured her a cup of tea just like the previous time.

She heaved a silent sigh of relief.

Phew, hopefully this means forgiveness and approval! He's probably asking for a report on my actions and wants me to self-reflect.

Ji Zhixiu accepted the cup of tea. Gazing into the brown liquid, she uttered, "I fought with him continuously for two days. Although he had a huge superiority, I too became much stronger after receiving your guidance and beat him into a continuous retreat."

"Yesterday, after paying a huge price and a ruthless assault of more than five hours, I managed to successfully destroy his headquarters..."

"However, it was only then that I realized he had abandoned his comrades and fled alone because he was aware he wasn't my match. Now, I realize that I had grossly underestimated him. Things developing so smoothly was basically a warning that something is wrong."

She raised her head in remorse. "I'm sorry Mr Lin, I got complacent."

"No, it's alright. It isn't your fault," Lin Jie said while maintaining his smile. However, he took a sip of tea to conceal the slight twitch on his lips.

Why does it feel like... something is off?! Haa... But it's said that love is like business and business is a battlefield. So by simple substitution, love is a battlefield. This young miss is used to using business terms so the way she expresses herself is a little... strange.

Ha, hahahaha.

And didn't that Ruen fellow call her "boss"? Looks like this young miss might be playing at being in a secret society or something like that. It's easy for children of powerful families to develop such a habit.

Mm...this makes more sense. What she means is that she battled with that scumbag over three days, perhaps a lover's spat, in court, or maybe even a more physical and bloody process.

The scumbag probably has his own accomplices, maybe a wing-man, or a side chick and neglected Ji Zhixiu with their help. But all of them were caught in Ji Zhixiu's line of fire.

However, Ji Zhixiu only understood that this crafty scumbag had actually prepared an escape route for himself—sacrificing his accomplices to save his own hide!

So it's like this...

Lin Jie nodded and cleared his throat, "I can totally understand if it's like this."

Only

Ji Zhixiu felt a tad delighted but she controlled her expression and asked cautiously, "Do you have any advice?"

As the two conversed, Ruen stood at the side with nothing to do. Out of habit, he used the corner of his eyes to survey this bookstore.

This was a professional habit of his built up over the years of being an information peddler. After becoming a hunter and joining the White Wolves, Ruen had specifically helped Heris with gathering information.

Although he wasn't an expert in combat, he was a true intelligence professional and even had contacts and eyes within the Truth Union!

He might have surrendered to strength and adopted a modest stance, but deep down, he had his own pride.

There was practically nothing in Norzin City that he didn't know.

He had even gotten his hands on an intelligence report that only a small number of people knew about——"Faceless Black-scaled Man" Wilde was currently in Norzin City!

Chapter 12 Where Did He Go?

Chapter 12: Where Did He Go?

“Rat” Ruen. That was the nickname others had for him.

The sordid blood used by most in the “White Wolves” hunter organization originates from a ferocious, widely known dream beast—Sky Wolf.

Such a moniker seemed like a huge irony within the “White Wolves” but Ruen was proud of it.

Was there anything wrong with being a cowardly rat?

To Ruen, words like treacherous, cunning and avaricious were positive connotations. Only people with such traits led longer lives.

His acute sense of smell and uncanny foresight were extremely useful tools for preserving his own life.

These skills were honed for years, ever since he had taken to the streets. He had switched allegiances countless times, turned traitor numerous times and held many bargaining chips that could enable him to get out of any situation.

No one could kill him, nor was anyone willing to. “Rat” Ruen himself was the only one that knew exactly how vast his intelligence network was.

And this time, he was relying on a woman.

When he witnessed the miraculous wolf beast mutation bringing with it destruction and blood, followed by the graceful transformation back into human, Ruen understood that the hunters of the night would see a new master.

This woman would bring about an unprecedented revolution!

But even if she failed, nothing would happen to “Rat” Ruen.

As for the magician's loyalty brand? Ruen had already secretly obtained the method to dispel it.

He had lived easily for many years by relying on defecting and surrendering under false pretenses whereas all those masters he had betrayed had already returned to dust. In unclear situations, those that clung on to a dead branch like fools such as the third leader Kaji... just proved how worthless and dangerous trust was.

When Ruen served under Heris, he too had used these tricks to have the "White Wolves" leader believe a notorious fellow like himself.

And now, deceiving this young, affluent lady was an easy task...

A rat had his own ambitions!

If he could obtain the method of controlling beast mutation, he would no longer be a rat scurrying in the sewers having to depend on others. With unparalleled strength on top of the intelligence network he controlled, Ruen believed that he could be a king even in broad daylight!

At that time, everyone would want to be subservient towards him...

Ruen retracted his gaze from the surroundings and turned his sights onto the bookstore owner. He scrutinized this being carefully, using all his forty years of experience to judge and determine exactly what this person was.

Finally, he came to a conclusion—This young man was just an ordinary person.

Although there was a stone gargoyle on the table, it didn't seem exceptional. *It's nothing more than a decorative ornament in ordinary homes*, thought Ruen to himself.

But...

His gaze fell onto Ji Zhixiu. The female hunter had on a look of utter reverence, as if the one opposite her was a Supreme-rank powerhouse.

Ruen was perplexed.

Have I gotten old? Have my rat senses gotten dull?

No, that shouldn't be it.

He was absolutely confident in his own judgment. Not too long ago, he had accurately determined that Heris would make a big move. After noticing that Heris wasn't treating his subordinates too well in recent times, he quickly switched his allegiance and averted a slaughter.

It proved that he was right. This time, Ruen chose to believe in himself too.

However, given his new master's veneration as well as his own innate tendency to be cautious, Ruen decided to first observe whatever sort of priceless advice this fellow would give out to be accorded such treatment.

Meanwhile, Lin Jie's thought process was simple. He wanted to help Ji Zhixiu quell her impatience and let her know that the scumbag wasn't his equal. After all, she had already achieved victory and the scumbag was afraid of her. All that needed to be done was to wait.

"Don't worry too much. The situation is simpler than you imagine. Your enemy isn't him but rather, some other stuff. What you are afraid, is fear itself so... just wait for the time being and you will get news soon."

That's it?

That's it?!

If waiting around not doing anything could solve problems, then what's the point for having Secret Rite Tower or hunters?

Ruen's brow furrowed. He didn't show any emotion on his face but his facial muscles were clenching up.

Big talk, empty words, ambiguous statements. Ruen was most familiar with these tricks commonly used by swindlers.

He couldn't be anymore certain that this bookstore only was a swindler through and through!

However, what flummoxed him was the humble way in which Ji Zhixiu took in that bookstore owner's words. "Thank you for your guidance, I benefited greatly from the book you lent me. However, the situation isn't like most. I hope..."

"Haa..." Ruen tried his hardest to calm down but his pride as the "rat" made him really want to throw that man to the ground and stomp all over him.

I must be getting old. How could I choose such a foolish young mistress? Damn it, how can this naive girl not see through a swindler like this!

Lin Jie's expression subtly changed as he placed down his tea cup and said, "Sorry, there's something I've to attend to. I will be done in about five minutes so please wait for a moment."

Ahh... damn. I did have quite a bit of tea. Why did this young missy have to strike a conversation just as it's my usual timing for using the bathroom.

As per routine, Lin Jie was reading and enjoying his tea while awaiting customers. Just as it was about to be his usual timing for using the washroom, Ji Zhixiu entered the bookstore and they struck a conversation. Even though Lin Jie was able to hold it in, he felt that it wasn't necessary and it wasn't good for the body. Besides, he was sure Ji Zhixiu wouldn't hold it against him.

Ji Zhixiu was stumped for a moment but nodded obediently after. "Please go ahead."

Lin Jie got up and disappeared up the stairs to the second floor.

Ji Zhixiu was about to mull over what the bookstore owner said when Ruen came over to her and said through gritted teeth, "Boss, what the hell are you doing?!"

Ji Zhixiu's eyes narrowed and she said coldly, "I only brought you here not because I didn't trust you but because I felt your grasp of information might be of use here. What gives you the right to talk

to me in this tone?”

“Don’t forget that with the brand on your neck, you are now a henchman of my family and not some wild rat. Perhaps you need to understand the rules better.”

Ruen’s face twitched as he exasperated, “He’s a swindler, an out-and-out swindler! Yes I may not have been observing proper rules but this I know! His tricks might seem consummate but I can easily find at least three others on the same level as him!”

A completely bamboozled blockhead being so high and mighty was viewing him as a sewer rat...

Ji Zhixiu’s face stiffened. “Shut up! I shouldn’t have brought you here. Narrow-minded people have limited perspectives indeed. If it weren’t for the fact that you are still useful, I would cut you down right now!” she berated.

“I’m absolutely loyal to you! I will prove it to you in a bit...”

Ruen slipped out a poison dart, concealing the killing intent in his eyes as he muttered, “I’ll prove it to you when he comes down.”

A blood curdling screech rang out in the bookstore.

Ruen and Ji Zhixiu were both stunned and immediately looked towards the counter top..

The jet-black sculpture was rapidly enlarging, swinging its long powerful tail and spreading out those huge wings as if it was an enormous shadow from hell.

The ominous red glow blazed even brighter as it set its sights on the person that had displayed killing intent—Ruen.

Only

With a flap of its wings, the gargoyle shot over at astonishing speed, ignoring Ruen’s disbelief and struggles as its claws tore off his head and swallowed it whole. Next, it devoured the rest of Ruen’s body in seconds before using its tongue to lick the blood off the floor and

shelves.

Ruen couldn't even cry out in the few seconds this whole episode had lasted.

The gargoyle then returned back to its stone sculpture form.

Thump Thump Thump.

Lin Jie came back downstairs and noticed Ji Zhixiu standing before the counter, staring blankly at the floorboards.

Finding it a little strange, Lin Jie asked, "Ah? Where's that subordinate of yours?"

Ji Zhixiu snapped back to reality. Face slightly pale, she looked towards Lin Jie and forced a weak smile, "He... he had an urgent matter to attend to."

Chapter 13 Steel Resolve

Chapter 13: Steel Resolve

The entire affair was something the treacherous and cunning “Rat” would have never imagined.

On the surface, “Rat” Ruen was seemingly an ordinary information peddler but in reality, he was someone who kept tabs on various factions from the shadows and had remained safe and sound over a few decades despite jumping from group to group.

In the end, he had died in this ordinary bookstore without uttering a single cry nor leaving a single trace.

Moreover, he had died as a result of the keen senses and perception he was so proud of.

Ji Zhixiu once again returned to her seat but she felt as though she was sitting on a bed of thorns. Her hands trembled along with the teacup she held as she kept glancing nervously at the stone gargoyle.

The demonic entity that had mercilessly devoured a human whole had turned back into the silent and un-moving sculpture, was now back at its original spot facing the door as if nothing had happened.

Ji Zhixiu didn’t know whether she was seeing things but the blood red glow of the gargoyle’s eyes seemed brighter than before...

This must be a warning from the owner! thought Ji Zhixiu as she watched Lin Jie come down and acted totally oblivious.

He must have seen Ruen’s suspicions and disrespects but felt it beneath himself to point them out and therefore got the gargoyle to eliminate that ignorant fellow!

He didn’t even want to see Ruen’s ugly death throes and found an excuse to leave!

Wait, he didn't actually use an excuse. He said that there was something he needed to attend to and would be back in five minutes. Wasn't he talking about the time he went upstairs to kill Ruen?!

This... this is totally what a black magician would do! Elegance and arrogance mixed with dark brutality... It's way more violent than what hunters are used to!

It's no wonder Wilde would appear here! Wilde, the most notorious Destructive-rank black magician in recent years, must be good friends with the bookstore's owner at least...

"Don't stand on ceremony, you can share whatever ideas you were talking about just now. I will definitely try my best to help," Lin Jie said with a kindly smile as he returned back to his own seat.

A shudder went down Ji Zhixiu's spine as she retracted her gaze from the stone gargoyle. "It's... it's nothing much. I was just thinking if you could lend me another book... I'm terribly sorry for how impolite my subordinate was. But please believe me, that isn't my intention."

At this moment, Ji Zhixiu was at an utter loss, just like a little girl that knew nothing instead of being the cold-blooded hunter that had just destroyed the headquarters of the "White Wolves" headquarters.

However, witnessing a person speaking to her moments before get killed without leaving behind a trace shook her to the core.

The fear that had taken hold of a body was something that couldn't be described. Moreover, for Ji Zhixiu, what was most terrifying had been her inability to even react as she watched Ruen die without putting up any resistance.

In other words, if she had been the stone gargoyle's target instead, it was more than likely that she would have silently vanished from the face of the earth.

Previously, she viewed Lin Jie with great respect but now, she was in total awe out of fear and reverence.

Lin Jie chuckled, "What has it got to do with anything, this is a bookstore after all. Just take your pick if you want to borrow some! Do you want to take a look at the books on these shelves?"

"However, everyone can only borrow three books in their name. Prices are slightly higher if you want to purchase books and only from those shelves behind you. Lin Jie said as he pointed at three shelves behind Ji Zhixiu. The books on those shelves were ones that he had already finished reading and had made copies of.

Ji Zhixiu shook her head. How could she dare poke her nose casually into this boundless and mystical book depository. Till now, she had only stopped at the prologue of the previous book, *Blood and Beast*.

She feared that delving any deeper into that taboo knowledge might cause her to go insane. For now, she could only wait for her own ability to increase before moving on.

"Could you please recommend a suitable book? My willpower is really too weak," Ji Zhixiu placed her hands on her knees and asked with caution.

Ji Zhixiu was clearly a matured, cold and aloof lady in her twenties but at this moment, she was acting like a pitiful kitty trying to gain her owner's favor.

Lin Jie found the way she acted baffling.

Why does it seem as though she has just run into a tiger in the five minutes I was away. She's even speaking softer than before.

She must have suffered a blow to her psyche.

Lin Jie pondered for a bit. *The only change that happened during this short period was her subordinate leaving abruptly to deal with an urgent matter.*

During the time when Lin Jie headed upstairs, he had vaguely heard what sounded like an argument.

If this was the case, Lin Jie's guess was that this subordinate must

have felt it inappropriate for the young mistress to visit this rundown bookstore. Therefore, he must have advised the young mistress to stay away from this ‘swindler’ but Ji Zhixiu must have objected due to the trust Lin Jie had built up.

In the end, the two parted on a bad note, and this subordinate had probably returned to report the young mistress’ misdeeds to the family.

Haa... it makes sense. It's probably this sort of temperament that allowed the young miss to encounter scumbags.

“Since this is the case, I do have a book which I can recommend to you.”

Lin Jie got up and scoured the shelf before pulling out a book. He patted away the dust on it, then turned around and said with a kindly smile. “Oh, by the way, that subordinate of yours seems a little mistaken.”

“Words like absolute loyalty are better shown through actions rather than words.”

Ji Zhixiu felt her heart shudder as she recalled what had just happened.

Sigils passed down from ancient times amongst white magicians, especially this “Loyalty” brand, was very popular amongst the upper class and rich families.

Of course, the way each magician drew a sigil was different and only the person who created a sigil would know how to dispel it.

If Ruen’s brand had lost effectiveness, that could only mean one thing—

Haywood, the white magician her father supported had possibly sold the sigil’s dispelling method to others without permission.

Lin Jie pushed the book across the counter and said, “Others might go through hell and you would never be able to know what others are thinking, am I not right?”

“There aren’t any methods that can completely lay a person’s heart bare in front of your eyes. The only thing that you can believe and rely on is yourself.”

“Therefore, strive! Nobody can defeat you when you become as strong as steel.”

Ji Zhixiu received the book with both hands, staring at the cover and muttering, “Steel...”

Only

Lin Jie smiled and nodded approvingly.

Yes, the book was ***How Steel Was Tempered*** .

“Read it well. If you are able to gain something from this, it would surely be helpful.”

“This way, one day, when you recall your past experiences, you wouldn’t feel remorse over your own mediocrity nor how others treat you.”

“You have your own mission.”

When Ji Zhixiu left the bookstore and stood absentmindedly in the rain, the bookstore owner’s words still echoed continuously in her mind.

She glanced at the book in her hand, ***Steel Resolve*** and slowly turned the cover page.

At that instant, an unknown power made her feel as if everything around her had become clear.

Chapter 14 Uncle, My Ass!

Chapter 14: Uncle, My Ass!

Raindrops lengthened into fine white lines, revealing their trajectory before becoming separate droplets in Ji Zhixiu's field of vision.

A strong gale blew past, sweeping along the many sounds that took shape in her mind.

Dark clouds in the sky appeared to converge as she heard the rustling of leaves, swaying power lines, people running, water flowing, breaths, heartbeats, blood, spirit, aether...

Ji Zhixiu felt as if her soul had been extracted yet it wasn't completely severed from her own body.

Her soul wasn't like a soul. It started to extend, just like a giant octopus stretching its tentacles into the sky in all directions and coming into contact with everything in its surroundings.

Ji Zhixiu was first bewildered, then she became aware of her current circumstances.

She instinctively glanced in the direction of the bookstore and she seemed to see fog and nothing much else.

Through the transom windows on the door, she saw Lin Jie skimming through the shelves as care-freely as ever.

Ji Zhixiu's gaze shifted to the stone gargoyle and saw close to a thousand souls of varying levels of putrefaction clumped tightly together above it, howling in grief with outstretched hands, as if trying to grab something in front of them.

Amongst them was a rather conspicuous and intact soul wailing in misery—The recently deceased “Rat” Ruen.

Ji Zhixiu didn't see the “Loyal” sigil branded anywhere on his soul.

Haywood's sigil was really dispelled! The moment this notion popped up, those invisible floating tentacles had already hurtled over rapidly and were constricting Ruen's soul that was already assimilated with the stone gargoyle

Ji Zhixiu suddenly felt a sharp pain in her mind, as if she had taken a hammer blow to the head.

"Ugh..." Ji Zhixiu groaned, steadying herself after taking half a step backwards.

She opened her eyes and glanced at the opened book in her hands, as her breathing got heavier.

"Haa... so that's the case..."

The hunter sensed that her recently transformed soul—The huge, formless, soul floating around her like an octopus was unable to leave her surroundings for the time being.

And the countless tentacles of this soul was currently wrapped around a frightened soul—Ruen.

His eyes widened as if wanting to speak but his mouth was tightly smothered by those invisible tentacles.

"An inextinguishable iron resolve used to strengthen the spirit... As expected of Mr Lin, transforming the structure of my soul with great ease and allowing it to be imbued with the great aether. I can be considered a Pandemonium-rank hunter not just in name. In Beast transformation state, it might even be possible to reach Destructive-rank."

Ji Zhixiu muttered to herself as wiped away a trickle of blood that had flowed out of her nose. Her iron gray eyes shone as she chuckled, "Being supported this way isn't too bad either."

All of it had been accorded to her by Mr Lin.

Perhaps, she might already be long dead if this bookstore hadn't opened its doors to her at the time where she was being pursued by her ex-comrades.

It wasn't wrong to say that Mr Lin had given her a second lease of life.

Ji Zhixiu's heart pulsed rapidly as she stood in the pouring rain. Finally, she bowed in the direction of the bookstore, silently expressing her allegiance and loyalty.

This was a show of reverence to a strong being as well as the etiquette of willingness to become a subordinate.

In Jin Zhixiu's eyes, Lin Jie had imparted so much to her, made her stronger and had even removed a traitor. On top of that, he hadn't asked for a single thing in return till now.

Therefore, it was most probable that he wanted to cultivate Ji Zhixiu's strength to change the hunter's social hierarchy.

Presumably, loyalty would be well-received by him.

So why don't I be more obedient? But, to think of it... Mr Lin's power is indeed deep and enigmatic.

In the state she was in a moment ago, Ji Zhixiu might even be able to see through gaps in a Destructive-rank's aetheric disguise. Yet, she hadn't spotted anything abnormal with Lin Jie.

He actually appeared equally as ordinary as when Ji Zhixiu viewed him with her naked eye!

He's just too admirable!

Lin Jie was straightening up the books on the shelves. From the corner of his eye, he noticed Ji Zhixiu outside and her action of wiping away her nosebleed, followed by her bow in this direction.

Lips twitching slightly, Lin Jie temporarily stopped in his tracks feeling a little weird as he watched her disappear into the distance.

Hey, hey.

This lass... wouldn't have a tendency to be easily infatuated, would she?

With such frequent visits to my bookstore... Could it be that she actually... no, no, no. It better not be!

Such impolite thoughts wouldn't be good for both parties.

Lin Jie shook his head vigorously and completely got rid of that passing thought.

Once again returning to his own seat, Lin Jie casually picked a random book and continued to while away time.

It just so happened that the book Lin Jie had selected was the ***Little Prince***.

A heartwarming children's tale with philosophical undertones and a cute narration.

Lin Jie was perfectly satisfied and decided that his pre-bedtime reading material would be it.

Jingle!

"Welcome."

Lin Jie repeated these words out of habit before freezing up momentarily when he realized that it was a customer.

Ah? Is today an auspicious day? That rich young miss is a bringer of good luck indeed!

Lin Jie rose up slightly and looked towards the door, his eyes lighting up when he saw that it was a completely new customer.

However... this newcomer didn't seem too friendly.

Baam!

The door closed and heaving thudding of leather shoes ensued.

Lin Jie first noticed the tall, robust body frame. It was elderly man dressed casually in a western suit but unlike his body, his face

seemed slightly haggard and weary.

Instantly, part of the already dim light was blocked out by this customer's large body.

Lin Jie had no choice but to adjust the brightness of the light before putting on his typical professional smile. "Hello, may I know how I can help? You are able to read, borrow and purchase books here."

Illuminated by the warm lights, that body built like a tank reminded Lin Jie of Schwarzenegger but the head full of white hair showed his age.

His sharp, weary eyes wandered all over the place, as if he was a resting lion inspecting his own territory.

Lin Jie found it difficult to discern this customer's age right off the bat.

Then...uncle it is. I can't go wrong by calling him an uncle.

Only

After scanning the entire bookstore once, this uncle's gaze fell onto the stone gargoyle on the counter. Eyes narrowing, he knocked on the table and spoke. "Are you the owner of this bookstore?"

"Aye, uncle, that's right," nodded Lin Jie.

"..." Joseph was stunned for a moment before squeezing out a word through gashed teeth, "Uncle?"

Uncle, My Ass!

If it had been some young knight addressing him this way, Joseph swore he would bash in that fellow's skull.

His chest heaved heavily multiple times but he swallowed his anger when he remembered that it was just an ordinary person before him.

Slam!

Joseph slapped his palms on the counter top and eyed Lin Jie carefully, “Is this stone gargoyle yours?”

Chapter 15 Truly Good Friends

Chapter 15: Truly Good Friends

Former Great Radiant Knight, Joseph had come to investigate the suspicious bookstore on 23rd Avenue where “Black-scaled Faceless Man” Wilde had spent an hour in.

Joseph had already gone through the information regarding this bookstore before coming over.

The intelligence report submitted was very detailed and thorough as the matter concerned a Destructive-grade black magician.

The background of this bookstore was spotless. The owner Lin Jie, was an out-of-townee from the Northern Highlands who set up his bookstore here three years ago. By a stroke of luck, Lin Jie’s extensive and valuable collection of books caught the favor of the Ash Chamber of Commerce’s vice-president and he was able to officially operate as a licensed business with their support.

These were all publicly recorded information within the Ash Chamber of Commerce’s internal department. The obsession with cleanliness Druids had and the Ash Chamber of Commerce’s reputation were two things that were undoubtedly credible.

And it seemed as if it was the truth indeed. The young man, as well as every corner of the bookstore didn’t cause even the slightest disturbance to the aether.

To a person of Joseph’s level, the flow of aether within the city of Norzin was very distinct and impossible to deceive.

Joseph came to the conclusion that the young man probably didn’t know anything and there wouldn’t be a need to spend too much effort interrogating him. Moreover, it was highly unlikely that Wilde would share his own personal information with this young owner so it just felt like a waste of time.

Joseph had made countless mistakes like this back in the day but now, he was experienced enough to know how best to prevent them.

Joseph had fully grasped the situation and the only anomaly was this stone gargoyle.

Besides buying or borrowing books, Wilde took an hour to leave a stone gargoyle here... There has to be a purpose. Could this be a coordinate...

Joseph fixed his pressuring gaze on Lin Jie and tried to determine whether the owner was lying. "Is this stone gargoyle yours?"

Upon hearing what was said, Lin Jie turned towards the stone gargoyle and shook his head in puzzlement. "Mm, It's a souvenir given to me by a customer."

Has this uncle taken a fancy to this art piece and wishes to purchase it?

Ah, that won't do. This souvenir given to me by Old Wil is of great significance.

While Lin Jie pondered how best to decline, Joseph's eyes caught sight of the register book on the counter top that had yet to be kept away and spotted a familiar name.

"Frank Wilde. He's your customer, am I right?" asked Joseph.

Naturally, Lin Jie didn't notice anything amiss nor did it cross it mind that someone could spot such tiny words on the corner of his register with just a single glance under this dim lighting. Moreover, Joseph had mentioned Wilde's full name.

Thus, Lin Jie became aware that this person knew Old Wil.

"Yes," Lin Jie nodded as he became more wary and wondered if this uncle was an enemy of Old Wil. *Why does it seem like he came in wanting to seek vengeance...*

Joseph brows furrowed. *Why would Wilde give an ordinary person a stone gargoyle of this level?*

This is definitely an archetypal stone gargoyle created by a black magician. It possesses extraordinary strength, at least a Pandemonium-rank!

It might even be capable of posing a certain degree of threat towards Joseph—breaking skin or causing him to bleed.

Moreover, he divulged his real name... No, wait a moment, perhaps revealing his name was intentional?!

The initial speculation was that the bookstore was a secret base for black magicians. But now that the bookstore owner was affirmed to be an ordinary person, the conjecture no longer held.

But if they were to treat the gargoyle as some sort of secret signal, then this place was just a location for black magicians to connect...

Noticing the uncle before him was in deep thought, Lin Jie now felt as if this person hadn't come with a vendetta.

Logically speaking, wouldn't the process of carrying out a vendetta begin with intimidation and threats, followed by an interrogation of Old Wil's whereabouts and recent activities before finally silencing me after I have talked?

It totally doesn't seem like it now. He merely asked a couple of irrelevant questions before mulling over it on his own. Can this even be called a vendetta?

Lin Jie had to change his thinking approach. Maybe, this uncle was Old Wil's friend?

While this uncle seemed uncongenial at first glance, Lin Jie could tell that he wasn't a bad person given his many years of experience at observing people.

The uncle might have entered in an overbearing manner but he had been careful with his actions and movements in order to not damage anything in the bookstore.

He hadn't kicked down the door nor smashed the counter even though he could probably have done so with ease.

With this line of thought, it appeared that this uncle was actually a careful and gentle person.

Thus, Lin Jie cleared his throat and asked, “Are you by any chance, Mr Wilde’s friend?”

Joseph was pulled back to reality and revealed an odd smile. “Friend? ...You could say that we go way back... Two years ago, we had a disagreement and parted on bad terms. It was only recently that I received information about him.”

Indeed , thought Lin Jie to himself.

Two years ago... Wasn't that when Old Wil first came to the bookstore? A disagreement with a good friend! No wonder he was in such low spirits... Haa, Old Wil hasn't had it easy.

Living alone in this huge city, having relatives turn their back on him and having a disagreement with a good friend.

But now, this uncle has probably decided to take the initiative and reconcile with Old Wil. How great!

“Ah, so that’s why. It’s no wonder you were able to recognize Mr Wilde’s item instantly. You guys must have been close.”

Joseph replied casually as he continued to pry on the sly, “Indeed, we knew each other well. You could even say that we were bosom pals. I’ve never stopped looking for him these past few years.”

Only

Itching to chop off Wilde’s head and ground his body to pieces would be a more honest description of the relationship that Joseph had with Wilde...

This had been nearly accomplished two years ago but Wilde had used some unknown method to avoid death.

Lin Jie was touched by the deep friendship the two old men shared. “It’s certainly an enviable friendship that you two have. Unfortunately, I don’t have Mr Wilde’s address.”

As if you know anything about us. Joseph's lips curled. He had unknowingly started chatting with the bookstore's owner.

This fellow's memory is going to be wiped away after I'm done anyway. It wouldn't hurt to have a little talk with him.

"Mr Wilde borrowed a book a few days ago and probably won't return for quite awhile. You might not get the chance to see him that soon... Perhaps you would like to have a seat and rest for a bit?"

Joseph looked up and found himself facing the young man's warm, kind smile. There was even a hot cup of tea prepared for him.

"Or perhaps, have a book to read?"

Chapter 16 Children's Bedtime Story

Chapter 16: Children's Bedtime Story

"Rest? Do I look that useless?" Joseph scoffed. However, his knight "Justice" sigil hadn't sensed any evil intentions from this bookstore owner, thus giving the old knight a better impression of this young man.

Joseph's indifference even started to thaw and unknowingly, he felt a rare inclination to chat with this bookstore owner that spoke to him casually and as an equal.

Perhaps after he became a Great Radiant Knight, it had been far too long since anyone dared speak to him so casually.

Since the bookstore owner was an ordinary person oblivious to the facts, Joseph didn't need to put on the airs of a superior or senior.

Lin Jie shook his head and replied sincerely. "Of course not! It's just... such recent gloomy weather would affect one's joints. Are you having trouble sleeping? Your face seems a little pallid and I can't help feeling that you are rather tired."

Rheumatism and insomnia might be more common for older people at this age. Moreover, Lin Jie had noticed that Joseph's right hand was a tad jarring.

Weariness of one's spirit might not be very obvious but Lin Jie was adept at observing people and could notice it without much difficulty.

"May I assume it's because you spent a lot of effort in trying to find Mr Wilde?" Lin Jie sighed with lament. "I'm really glad that you guys have such a great friendship."

Joseph's mechanical right hand that was covered with a layer of

synthetic skin twitched as doubt crept into his eyes.

How did this owner... No, it should be a coincidence.

But why do the words 'joints', 'sleep' and 'Wilde' put together seem significant, as if he's pointing out something? And him saying 'great friendship' seems somewhat peculiar?

Still, it had been Joseph who said he was bosom pals with Wilde in the first place.

With a slightly complicated expression, Joseph said, "I'm not that sort of old person whose joints would ache when it rains. I'm also not tired because of this... Also, a book is unnecessary. I didn't bring any money."

Lin Jie pulled a stool over and sat down as he watched Joseph ramble on.

Deep down, Lin Jie was shaking his head. He knew right away that Joseph might seem coarse on the outside but warm and tender on the inside.

Lin Jie pushed the cup of hot tea towards Joseph and said, "There aren't any charges for reading a book at my store but it's only limited to the section behind me. Have some tea to warm yourself up first."

"I can help pass on the message to Mr Wilde that you are looking for him."

Joseph took a sip but was unaccustomed to the taste of these tea leaves. Frowning, he shook his head. "There's no need. I'll leave after resting for a bit."

At the moment he frowned, the dull pain in his head started to throb once again.

Damn it, it's getting more frequent.

Joseph endured it, shifting the stool beneath him slightly. As his seating angle and attention shifted, he caught sight of the book Lin

Jie had placed at the side.

Joseph's eyes suddenly narrowed.

Seed of the Abyss ?

"It just so happens that I'm reading this really relaxing children's story. It's really soothing for the soul. Perhaps you might want to try it out? I feel that reading it before bedtime really helps to relieve stress." Lin Jie casually continued the conversation.

According to his literature and language teacher back in senior high, the tougher-looking a guy was, the more likely he was a gentle girl at heart.

Lin Jie firmly believed this without a doubt.

The person before him right now was a sensitive and gentle being who constantly clung on to that friendship. Therefore, Lin Jie was ninety percent certain that this old man belonged to such a category.

"Children's story?" Joseph made a sound that was between a scoff and laugh. "Those funny and childish things. Young man, you aren't a kid anymore, why do you like reading such books?"

"Well, it's the best children's tale I have ever read and it's the only copy in Norzin." Lin Jie regretfully withdrew his hand that held ***The Little Prince*** . "A pity..."

Joseph pursed his lips and pointed at the book in Lin Jie's hand. "You mean this book? A children's tale? Are you sure?"

*What kind of children's tale is named **Seed of the Abyss** ? Is this a children's tale for wild beasts of the dream realm?*

Lin Jie nodded with slight bafflement. "Of course! It's a really good children's book, an absolute classic."

Joseph couldn't help suspect something was wrong but he hadn't sensed any changes to the flow of aether yet.

However, he now had an urge to find out why a children's tale would have such a title.

“Hand it over.” Finally, Joseph expressionlessly stuck out his hand and leaned in. “I’ll just take a casual look, consider it fulfilling your wish.”

Lin Jie smiled knowingly as he handed the book over.

Joseph pretended to casually browse the cover and title— ***Seed of the Abyss*** .

Can...can this really be called a children's bedtime story?

As he took the book into his outstretched hand, Joseph suddenly felt a bout of dizziness.

The acute pain in his mind which he tried really hard to suppress intensified rapidly. Shadows clouded his vision and a soft muttering rang out in his ears.

A strange sensation started from the bottom of his spine, before seemingly engulfing his entire soul and sweeping away the pain.

Joseph started to lose his balance.

“!”

This relentless sensation was just too familiar!

Demon Sword Candela! Why does it seem to be resonating with something...

Why at this time?

Wait a moment, did this fellow mean this when he said ‘bedtime’?

Could this be a trap?

The bookstore owner's voice faded into the distance as Joseph lost consciousness at this moment, and crashed to the ground.

“Hey, hey! Hey! Uncle!”

“Uncle, are you alright!”

“Hey, hey hey! Are you okay!”

Lin Jie’s expression changed as he flipped himself over the counter rapidly and went to support the uncle.

Don’t tell me... he’s gotten a stroke?

This uncle is a little advanced in age but his physique still seems healthy and unlike a person.

But he is elderly after all...

I’ve got to save him first!

However, after using up all his strength to lay Joseph on the floor, Lin Jie realized that this uncle’s breathing and heartbeat were both stable.

It didn’t seem like any strange ailment but more like a peaceful sleep.

“He’s fine?”

Only

Slightly doubtful, Lin Jie reached out to Joseph’s wrist and used his fingers to read the pulse.

As a folklore studies scholar, it was normal for Lin Jie to know some basic pulse reading skills.

Lin Jie frowned and put down Joseph’s wrist. “Uncle, you are really fit. This pulse is even stronger than mine during my prime,” lamented Lin Jie.

But why would you suddenly faint?

It shouldn’t be anything to do with this book right?!

*In this world, people wouldn’t just faint upon seeing **The Little Prince** , even if it was the last thing he did before fainting was taking the book,*

thought Lin Jie to himself.

*It's definitely unrelated. This is **The Little Prince** , a soothing children's bedtime story that soothes the heart after finishing it and not something that induces a heart attack!*

But as this uncle had fainted, Lin Jie could only sigh and temporarily help him rest comfortably. He would probe more when the uncle awakens.

Chapter 17 Butcher In The Rainy Night

Chapter 17: Butcher In The Rainy Night

Lin Jie remembered he had a spare fold-able deckchair in his basement. It was narrow and not suitable for prolonged periods of sleep but it could be used for a short rest.

Lin Jie immediately went downstairs to bring the deckchair up. He had a habit of cleaning his basement every once in a while so the deckchair wasn't dirty and he could use it right away.

"I knew he would be heavy, but I never expected him to be this heavy..." Lin Jie muttered, realizing his mistake after failing three attempts to lift up Joseph by his armpits. "He's like a two meter tall grizzly bear covered completely in muscles!"

The difference in height hadn't been that obvious when Lin Jie was seated on his high stool at the counter while Joseph remained standing. But now, Lin Jie really felt as if he was grappling with a large beast.

Joseph was at least two meters tall and had a body that was thoroughly encased in rippled muscles. Those fists of his were the size of sandbags and Lin Jie was certain that a single punch from them could pulverize a person's head.

He has such a terrifying physique even though his hair has already turned white. Shouldn't an ordinary elderly person be frail and skinny like... Old Wil? Lin Jie wondered as he watched Joseph lying motionlessly on the ground.

What do I do? I can't just leave him there! If a customer comes in, I can probably try asking for help to move him together. But how could there be any other customers in this horrendous weather?

"Haa... Never-mind. I'm really very sorry but I'm left with no

choice. I hope you can forgive me.” Lin Jie apologized sincerely.

Next, he reached out and grabbed the scruff of Joseph’s suit, huffing and puffing as he slowly dragged the heavy body up and onto the deckchair.

Bang!

Joseph’s right arm fell on the deck chair’s armrest, creating a loud metallic crash.

Lin Jie was startled and immediately glanced over at Joseph’s bare right wrist.

A silver metallic luster was especially prominent under the warm lights. Detailed scale-like markings were uniquely aesthetic, displaying the top-notch craftsmanship of this mechanical arm.

Lin Jie’s expression changed. *This uncle... like Old Wil, is disabled?*

Moreover, this exquisite prosthetic limb wasn’t something that most ordinary people could use. Lin Jie knew a little about these sorts of artificial limbs.

Lin Jie had previously done extensive research due to his curiosity about the technology in this world as well as his interest in folklore studies. All of this had also been for Lin Jie to understand the customs and ideologies of people in this world so he could integrate himself to this world better.

Although Azir seemed like Earth in the 80s and 90s, certain technology standards—especially mechanical and biological—had far surpassed Earth’s level and gave rise to certain strange branches of science.

One such example was mechanical limbs.

However, standard mechanical limbs were already considered high-end goods that most people would never have any chance of using, much less the kind that Joseph used.

It was something that couldn’t be purchased just through monetary

means.

“This grade of precision and weight definitely surpasses ordinary daily needs, huh,” Lin Jie muttered to himself. “In addition to this uncle’s startling physique and that overwhelming aura, could he be...”

Lin Jie felt that he was close to guessing this uncle’s real identity. “...A retired high ranking officer?”

Lin Jie nodded his head expectantly. Indeed, he had come across military personnel in the past, and the vibe they gave off was really similar to this uncle’s. All of them had these natural rigid and righteous vibes.

Also, with that tough exterior and hidden weariness he displayed, Lin Jie felt it was highly possible that this uncle was a veteran suffering from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

The right arm he lost was probably due to his honor on the battlefield!

“No wonder he had a strange expression when I mentioned joints just now,” Lin Jie came to a sudden realization.

The mechanical was made of metal but what allowed it to move freely would be the electric signals from the nervous system to the prosthetic arm’s synthetic nerves and muscles. Lin Jie wasn’t too sure of the principles behind its operation but he knew one thing—the connection point of metal to joints would easily short circuit due to moisture. Thus, the effect of rainy weather on these artificial prostheses would more or less be equivalent to rheumatism.

“It just doesn’t feel very reliable, haa... Perhaps he fainted because there was an issue with the prosthesis? If constant electrical leaks... it would probably affect the nerves too.”

Lin Jie sighed and tucked Joseph’s arm away.

He took two steps back and watched the unconscious Joseph confined to the narrow deckchair illuminated under the dim lights as wind and rain continued to rage outside.

“Why does it suddenly feel as if I’m doing something strange...”

For a moment, Lin Jie felt as though he was some sort of murderous butcher on a rainy night.

Killing someone on this rainy night, dragging away the heavy body to a hidden store to do some unimaginable things before admiring his work as long streams of blood painted the ground red.

This was the sort of feeling he got.

“Ha,” Lin Jie shook his head and laughed. This imagination of his was really too vivid. Would any normal person think this way?...

However, as a kind and upright person, he was confident nobody would doubt his character even if they saw him in this situation that was very liable to misunderstandings!

As Lin Jie straightened his back, he suddenly realized that ***The Little Prince*** was still in Joseph’s hand and despite losing consciousness, his grip hadn’t loosened.

Only

Lin Jie smiled, “Even tough, unyielding men can have fairy-tale-like dreams. Have a good rest.”

Thunk!

Lin Jie jumped when he heard a faint noise from outside the bookstore which sounded like something had dropped to ground. Slightly startled, he turned around.

What seemed like a hazy silhouette of a man flitted across the windows quickly, as if it was trying to get away as quickly as possible.

“Is someone there?” Lin Jie frowned and called out.

He walked to the door and opened it but there was no one outside. All he saw was a black cat scampering away in the rain. Moments later, it had disappeared from view.

“What... it’s just a cat, huh.”

Lin Jie waved to the cat and chuckled, “Hurry on home. It’s dangerous outside, be safe!”

Chapter 18 No Other Choice

Chapter 18: No Other Choice

“Damn it! God damn it! How could it be?!”

Human expressions of shock and fear appeared on the black cat’s face as it ran through the pouring rain.

After running for a long time, the exhausted black cat suddenly tripped and tumbled a small distance. However it got up again and continued running several more steps before darting into a small alley to hide.

“Haa haa... Haa haa...”

The black cat shook off water droplets on its fur before cautiously survey its surroundings and heaving a sigh of relief when it didn’t see anyone around.

The black cat went limp and sat its butt on the ground.

“Transformation Technique – Dispel!”

Its breathing gradually calmed down as it opened its mouth, giving rise to the slight shrill voice of a youth going through puberty.

A slight aetheric disturbance made the black cat’s body enlarge and turn into a youth around the age of sixteen.

Morrison Greg, a brown-haired boy with a face full of freckles, capable of turning into a cat.

Morrison was an investigation staff at Secret Rite Tower’s intelligence branch, currently one year into the job. Although he was still rather young, Greg had exceptional talent in transformation and thus had the qualifications to undergo individual missions.

However, the circumstances were different this time round.

This was a lull period for Greg and he hadn't taken up any assignments. However, he heard that the former Great Radiant Knight Joseph had gone alone to investigate and didn't allow other staff to tag along due to the threat of Wilde.

As a youth who had joined the intelligence branch because he idolized Joseph, Greg was well-versed in the past history between the Great Radiant Knight Joseph and black magician Wilde.

Due to curiosity and worry for his idol, Greg had cautiously tailed Joseph to this bookstore.

Naturally, he had fully utilized his special ability and kept a very safe distance. There was absolutely no way he would let himself be exposed.

That was until a few moments ago.

After waiting outside the bookstore for approximately ten minutes, Greg decided to take a slight peek at the situation inside. In the end, what he saw was an extremely terrifying scene!

A Destructive-rank Radiant Knight, the Indomitable Sacred Flame, a half metal monster in human form was actually cowering in pain before the counter and fell to the ground moments later!

Greg swore that he had seen everything very clearly with those cat eyes of his.

A second ago, Joseph was still conversing peacefully with that seemingly amiable bookstore owner and in the next second, Joseph had crashed to the ground.

Following that, the bookstore owner had leaped over the counter and reached out to the large knight's wrist and performed some strange actions. Greg was certain that it was definitely some form of evil sorcery!

Next, the bookstore owner roughly dragged the motionless knight onto a tiny vessel and even muttered some mocking words in an icy manner.

Even tough, unyielding men can have fairy-tale-like dreams?

Is he suggesting that Sir Joseph's impulsiveness coming into enemy territory alone is akin to a child's naivety?

Or is he suggesting that Secret Rite Tower's great undertaking to cleanse the darkness was merely a fantasy?

"God damn it! He even said 'have a good rest'. Did he mean to let the Indomitable Sacred Flame remain in slumber for all eternity?!" Greg shuddered.

It was just too terrifying! And worst still, he had accomplished most of it...

"What the hell is going on? Who is that bookstore owner? How could Sir Joseph collapse with even putting up any resistance?" blabbered Greg. His face was pale and his body trembled uncontrollably, as if he had just managed to escape from the jaws of death.

No, there was no as if. He had really just escaped from the jaws of death. Greg would never forget the feeling of his heart coming to a halt at the moment where he accidentally knocked over some junk items beside the door.

The bookstore owner could have definitely caught him but chose to stop at the door.

However, Greg knew that the bookstore owner had seen through his disguise.

It's dangerous outside?

Yes, the true danger had been right before Greg's eyes.

And there was only one 'safe' way out—'home'

The bookstore owner had deliberately let him off so that he could return back and report the news!

Perhaps it was a warning, or perhaps it was a provocation or maybe

even derision.

But, he was left with no other choice now...

Joseph had fallen!

Now, only he could pass on this information to Secret Rite Tower.

Morisson Greg, an investigation staff of Secret Rite Tower's intelligence branch for a year, now undertook an extremely important mission.

Suppressing the fear coursing through his body, he gritted his teeth and once again transformed into a black cat before shooting off in the direction of Secret Rite Tower.

Joseph had once again sunk into hallucinations.

A vast expanse of sky and nothingness extended before him. Stars of all shapes and sizes, flickering continuously filled the murky sky.

Millions of light years away, celestial bodies were in an endless cycle of emergence and destruction as the concept of time gradually faded.

In this starry expanse, countless colossal shadows floated within.

Many a time, these humongous shadows would roam from this place to reality, forming a strange yet beautiful picture before Joseph's eyes as the two spaces overlapped.

It was like the shock of seeing a blue whale traveling back and forth the city. But most of the time, this amazement was mostly painful.

Because most of the time, it wrecked his cognition, leaving him drowning in a fear of the unknown.

Moreover, demon sword Candela would traverse through millenniums and wail mournfully towards these starry expanse.

Joseph would feel as if it was just like a child yearning for its mother.

Truth be told, for Joseph, holding the demon sword Candela was like looking after a misbehaving child. It was very hard for Joseph to control this child's emotions and he found it increasingly difficult to discipline it the older he got with age.

But things were different this time round. Joseph had a book in his hand. A book that wasn't thick nor large.

"Whoosh..."

Pages of the book flipped rapidly, and an indescribable taboo language flitted past eyes.

"One who gazes at the abyss will have the abyss gaze into them and gain the recognition of the abyss..."

"W-wait...Damn it! A trap! Aaarghhh!"

Joseph was roused awake by the intense pain in his mind caused by the overload of information. A slight hint of joy appeared within the demon sword's berserk state.

Why is it so happy? Is it because of this book? Children's story... this is for a child indeed!

Only

Joseph's eyes shot wide open. He stared blankly at the unfamiliar ceiling and attempted to move but felt unable to do so.

He lowered his gaze and saw himself clutching the "children's story".

So it's a story for this sort of child...

"Ehh? Uncle, you have woken up?"

Joseph heard a familiar young voice. He turned his head and saw that familiar smiling face.

The pain in his head had already vanished. Shaking his head, Joseph stretched an arm out and propped himself up.

“Thank you,” muttered Joseph.

Chapter 19 Entrust It To Me

Chapter 19: Entrust It To Me

“Thank you,” Joseph said instinctively and these words were his innermost sentiments indeed. Even though his suspicions and wariness hadn’t diminished, he was sincerely grateful.

Joseph sat up straight, his heavy body placing immense stress on this old deckchair, causing it to produce a loud creak. Wincing, he decided he might as well stand up.

The bookstore owner waved his hands dismissively and said, “It’s alright, helping customers is just something I ought to do. Anyway, how are you feeling now?”

Joseph moved his joints and muscles, then made a clenched fist, creating a sound akin to a bow string being drawn taut. It was as if this fist was a drawn bow full of accumulated energy that would display extremely startling power when released.

He took a deep breath, his mind in a state of calm. Unlike past situations where he was tormented by delusions, his senses were exceptionally clearer. This was an unprecedented state of relaxation.

There were still some remnants of Candela’s sentiments.

Serenity, elation, comfort...

Unable to control himself, a relieved smile appeared on Joseph’s face. This feeling of being at his peak had finally returned after two years.

Lin Jie watched from the side as his lips twitched slightly. *If this uncle’s fist struck someone, it would very likely be fatal.* He now felt his conjecture had been rather spot-on.

This stance, he really has the vibe of a military man... That austere look

and that dangerous aura that makes one's hairs stand on end.

"I'm good now. Never been better," Joseph nodded as he withdrew his clenched fist and adopted a normal posture.

Deep down, he mulled over what the bookstore owner had said. *Helping customers is something I ought to do... Does he mean to say he adopts a neutral stance and helps any customer regardless of who they are?*

Even a heinous and cruel black magician like Wilde, or a crushed knight hell-bent on vengeance like myself. No, this seems more like a messed up desire to be kind. Anyone who steps into this bookstore would receive help from this owner.

Joseph had only seen this modus-operandi amongst one community—elves.

A minority race from ancient times that had yet to die out till this day, elves were beings with long lifespans, graceful and adept in many arts.

Joseph felt that the vibe of this bookstore owner before him was really similar to them.

Only with a long lifespan would one lose desire to determine between good and evil and instead spend his time pursuing new interests.

The bookstore owner treated others politely and with a natural air of grace. Also, running a bookstore and his love for reading books corresponded to the affinity elves had to arts. Humans didn't have too much interest in books nowadays.

Coincidentally, the demon sword Candela's first owner was an elf by the name of Candela. Furthermore, from legends of times long forgotten, Candela was a prince of the ancient elf kingdom and later became the king of moon elves. Also, he was also known by two other names, 'the source of the great pestilence' and 'first lunatic'.

His descent to lunacy was long lost in history but the only well-known bit was that he had killed himself with his own sword.

The sword became a wedge that crucified his soul.

His soul became a curse, causing this sword to become a demon sword. Thus, the prince and his sword came to share a name.

From then on, every wielder of the demon sword would ultimately die after going crazy.

Before today, Joseph felt that he wasn't too far away from meeting this end. However, everything was different now!

This book in his hand could actually placate the demon sword Candela! Therefore, as he thought about it, he felt that a bookstore owner capable of owning such a book could only be an elf...

Given this assumption, the lack of disturbance in the aether made sense. If an elf had survived from ancient times to the present, he wouldn't be capable of utilizing his power in other aspects besides prolonging his own life!

Now, as Joseph thought back to what the bookstore owner had said previously, he began to understand everything.

Holding up the book in his hand, Joseph looked towards the bookstore owner and muttered, "You mentioned before that this was the only copy and you liked reading it... Can this be borrowed?"

Lin Jie blinked once, then chuckled, "Of course, I wouldn't have brought it out nor recommended it if it weren't the case." Clearing his throat, Lin Jie continued. "Actually, I felt that this book was very suitable for you the moment i first laid my eyes on you."

"Many others like you suffer great pain from inner anguish and regret, often finding yourselves lacking in strength and resolve. As a result, stuff like this as a result of doubting yourself eventually drives you crazy."

Alas, Lin Jie had seen war veterans before. Oftentimes, their errors and experiences on the battlefield would eat away at them on the inside because most of the time, even the tiniest of mistakes on the battlefield could easily cost a life.

“But actually, it isn’t any pain that defeats them, but their frail kindness.”

Joseph was stunned and muttered, “Kindness?”

He had met two previous wielders of the demon sword, both reputable Great Radiant Knights of Secret Rite Tower. Both accomplished many great deeds and had perfect principles.

But ultimately, without exception, they were corrupted by the demon sword. In the end, their greatest regret was their lack of strength that made them unable to thoroughly control the demon sword!

Lin Jie shook his head as he took a deep long look at Joseph, then returned back behind the counter. Folding his arms, he continued, “Kindness is a good thing. But the keyword here is frail.”

“Expectations of such people are too high because of their virtuous morals and sense of responsibility. In order to give others help and faith, such people would arm themselves to appear like nothing can knock them down but in reality, such defenses are especially frail.”

“Once spirit crumbles, anything can become a chink in that armor. This kindness can save others but it is powerless to save themselves.

And when you gaze long enough into the abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you—There are times where you aren’t needed to be an omnipotent hero but rather, an ordinary person instead. Retreating at an appropriate juncture is a form of courage and it shouldn’t overwhelm you.”

Chicken soup doled out! There’s no way you haven’t been moved. Lin Jie put on his usual professional smile.

This was a classic Teacher Lin marketing technique, binding the customer and merchandise together to let him feel deserving of such an item.

Joseph mulled over Lin Jie’s words and felt slightly enlightened.

So that’s the case...

Only

The demon sword's corruption didn't happen overnight. Knights had impeccable ideals yet they were eventually eroded.

They had always assumed that the curse was just too powerful. But nobody expected that behind it all, it was actually the demon sword having a grip over the wielder's 'inner demons'!

We've been mistaken all this time! Damn it!

"But will just appeasing it work for a long time?" asked Joseph with a frown.

Hmm?

"Of course not," replied Lin Jie with a shake of the head. But it was quickly followed by a smile. "But if you wish, I can help if you entrust it to me for long term effectiveness."

Heheh, if this happens, wouldn't I have gotten a long term customer who wants to resolve his emotional issues? Lin Jie thought to himself delightedly.

Chapter 20 S-Rank Zone

Chapter 20: S-Rank Zone

Selected past wielders of the demon sword were the strongest, most outstanding and practically flawless amongst the ten Great Radiant knights.

As the current wielder of the demon sword, Joseph had once been a dazzling entity just like the sun. But like a diamond, he was brittle beneath his excessive toughness.

During the battle with Wilde, he lost his right arm, as well as the glowing aura around him.

Even if he had continued to have supporters as always, the Indomitable Sacred Flame had already shown flaws that wouldn't be forgotten.

Countless doubts and criticism flocked in from unseen places. Even if nobody dared say it outright and many others reckoned Wilde was already dead, Joseph's self-doubt was starting to overwhelm him.

In the end, Joseph chose to retire. Taking up a semi-retirement role as a section chief in the intelligence branch, Joseph became depressed, irascible and sloppy.

Perhaps, his burning desire to apprehend Wilde was a result of wanting to prove himself once again.

He knew how certain people would view him. The first to let himself go before the demon sword's corruption took root and hence become the demon sword wielder that lived the longest.

"Perhaps he is thinking of letting himself degenerate when the demon sword isn't paying attention. This way, the demon sword wouldn't be able to corrupt him!" someone had said this back then.

Joseph felt that he had really fallen from grace and at that time, he was really itching to blow up that person's head with a punch.

Oh Sacred Light above, please forgive me.

He had nearly acted on it and this was some blasphemous way of thinking!

But now, perhaps he was more fortunate than other wielders of the demon sword because as the halo around him disappeared and as he drifted aimlessly, it actually lessened the cracks in his spirit which resulted in the demon sword's corruption slowing down.

Therefore, in a certain sense, what this bookstore owner said was actually right. Moreover, Joseph was even more fortunate, because he might have just found... the demon sword's successor.

When the bookstore owner had said, "entrust it to me", Joseph had to admit that he was certainly tempted.

The demon sword, Candela wasn't necessarily a possession of Secret Rite Tower but they utilized it despite its curse because it possessed great power. Secret Rite Tower handled this demonic weapon by letting the strongest knight keep it in check and use its power to go up against other evil forces.

However, in truth, Secret Rite Tower had a deep fear towards this sword as well. As generation after generation of Great Radiant Knights descended into madness and died, those old knights of the Senior Assembly already had notions of sealing this sword away for all of eternity.

Being unable to find a new successor was what Joseph worried about all this time. The knight that was elected to succeed his position had fine ideals and principles but lacked sufficient strength.

"Are you certain? Would it trouble you? Handling it isn't an easy task..." said Joseph softly. He felt a deep veneration for the bookstore owner's willpower.

The demon sword didn't just give a person power, the curse of

insanity that followed closely was frightening. Even vicious villains definitely wouldn't pick up the demon sword unless they were at their wits end.

However, this bookstore owner had voluntarily offered to undertake this burden!

This was such a great self-sacrificing spirit! Not only had he helped Joseph temporarily alleviate the delusions and pains brought about by the demon sword, he even made a decision that he wouldn't be able to turn back from.

It's the abyss that lays ahead... mused Joseph to himself.

"How would that trouble me? You seem like you are already struggling to keep it in check so why not entrust it to me."

Lin Jie had already become accustomed to the little worries of customers. Indeed, handling emotional problems wasn't an easy task. Even a pure listener could find himself affected by a torrent of negativity.

But it was alright! Being a life mentor was his specialty!

Smiling, Lin Jie said, "I've already said a lot, the choice is in your hands. It's fine too if you think there is no need. Let me give you this book, as a gift."

Lin Jie then, eyed Joseph's right arm and sighed, "You, and other heroes like you ought to rest sometimes."

Joseph couldn't help looking around him. The bookstore's gloominess had become simple and plain. The smile of this young bookstore owner before him was dazzling, as if it was glowing.

Joseph couldn't believe that any human could be this noble and selfless. Even the knights of Secret Rite Tower were only able to gradually build up their impeccable character through following the creed and faith from a young age.

Only with longevity could one pursue this manner of kindness that transcended common sense.

Joseph's was even more certain of his conjecture now.

The past Joseph might have dismissed this person as a fraud but he no longer thought this way.

One would never be able to understand others. The only thing he could do was persist with himself.

Wilde had survived and was helped by the bookstore owner. But it was alright, for he would ultimately be slain by Joseph!

This was Joseph's duty and what he needed to do...

"No, I will not have regrets since I've chosen to become this sort of person. As for resting? That can wait till after the world is peaceful," Joseph shook his head as he displayed a relieved smile. "I need to consider it. Anyway, you don't have to give me this book but could you lend it to me for a few days? Mm... make it seven days. I'll return and see you after seven days."

Lin Jie could fully understand the complicated emotions in Joseph's heart. *Haa... Looks like an excessive sense of justice has really caused this retired veteran great suffering.*

Surely he wants to contribute more towards righteous undertakings, yet he also hates his body and psychological issues. Sorting out these emotional problems would do him good.

Plan succeeded! thought Lin Jie to himself with a slight grin.

He was now 80% certain that Joseph would return after seven days. Expertly bringing out the register, Lin Jie said, "Absolutely no problem, just fill in your particulars right here and put down a deposit. In future, you just have to write down your name and the date. If you no longer wish to borrow anymore, half the deposit will be refunded."

Joseph was stunned. *Is he really running a bookstore...*

But when he thought about it, this made for a normal guise. Thus, nodding his head, Joseph picked up the pen and signed his name. He glanced at the row with "Frank Wilde" and saw that there was

still a loan period of a month.

“Done,” said Joseph as he put down the pen and looked up.

Lin Jie took the register and made sure everything was in order.

“Alright, see you in a week.”

Only

Joseph then picked up *Seed Of The Abyss* and then gave the bookstore owner a formal knight’s bow.

Disbelief coursed through Claude as he held the struggling black cat.

“Are you saying he’s knocked out? How is that possible?”

“Gather up manpower to provide support... No, damn it, we mustn’t make any rash decisions. Even Teacher couldn’t handle it! Acting recklessly might result in disastrous consequences,” muttered Claude as he paced around on the spot, handheld receiver clenched tightly.

“What about the men sent to investigate the bookstore? What’s the situation now?”

“Wait, what? Teacher is back?”

Claude was stunned as the deep raspy voice of Joseph sounded out of the receiver. “Claude, get the investigation staff to clear 23rd Avenue and classify that bookstore as an S-Rank zone. Status: top secret.”

Chapter 21 Melissa

Chapter 21: Melissa

S-Rank?!

A, P, D, S. Abnormal, Pandemonium, Destructive, Supreme... This is a Supreme rank!

Claude licked his lips and asked dryly, “Teacher, what exactly happened? That bookstore owner...”

“Is there anybody else beside you?” Joseph’s stern voice sounded on the other end.

“Erm... uh, yes.”

Claude glanced at the black cat that was already close to fainting from his tight grip. “Sorry Teacher, I was negligent!” replied Claude before he gave the black cat a quick chop to the nape, knocking it unconscious.

“If you know that you’ve been negligent, then why don’t you shut up and carry out your job? Should I send you to the Northern Highlands to be a potato farmer?” growled Joseph.

“Please, no! I’ll pass on your orders right away!” Claude shook his head. He knew that his teacher was pissed. But as his teacher’s proud disciple, he had lots of experience dealing with this irascible old fogey.

His teacher had a sharp tongue but a tender heart. While he seemed fierce and had fists that could pulverize a person’s skull at any moment, in reality, he was someone who would stop and feed strays on the side of the road and would even pretend to unintentionally pet their heads.

Joseph was terrifying when he got mad. But as long as his instructions were followed and things were done properly,

everything would be fine. This was just a tactic Joseph employed to get things done quickly.

Claude informed the investigation staff members at 23rd Avenue to withdraw at once, and diverted them elsewhere.

Half were asked to be on standby while the other half were dispatched to monitor the hunters' activity. Following that, he contacted personnel in charge of the intelligence branch's archives.

The most important job of Secret Rite Tower's intelligence branch was keeping tabs on the various powers and there were huge archives on each and every one of them.

The list announced by the Truth Union each year required the referencing of Secret Rite Tower's archives. Thus, each year, Secret Rite Tower would get an exorbitant amount of money from the Truth Union as compensation.

Generally speaking, in accordance with the regulations, establishing a new file required a thorough investigation by the higher levels and would take a longer time. But, Joseph had originally been one of the ten Great Radiant Knights.

Now, amongst the ten Great Radiant Knights, half of the current bunch were Joseph's juniors and besides the three older ones, all the others would give him face. Therefore, after this information was expedited to the higher ups, it was approved rather quickly.

"Teacher, the new S-rank file has already been established, you just have to fill in the details personally after you return," reported Claude.

Bang!

The door was slammed open roughly. Claude turned around and saw the robust, white-haired old man in a suit striding in.

"Good," Joseph threw his receiver onto the sofa and removed his coat before asking, "Who was beside you just now? Remember to use the 'Forget' sigil."

Claude lifted the black cat up. “An investigation staff member of our branch. Morrison Greg of the squad four. He comes from an influential family of magicians and is especially talented at transformation technique. Uh, there’s another thing that’s slightly special. He’s a fan of yours.”

“Fan?” exclaimed Joseph with an odd look on his face. However, he quickly returned to his expressionless self before sitting down at his desk and turning on his computer. “I’ve got fans everywhere.”

Claude replied, “Err, he is a member of 13 Indomitable Sacred Flame fan clubs and spends roughly 300 million a year on fan activities, including last year’s ‘turn Abraham Joseph’s name on Truth Union’s official list gold’. I guess he counts as a die-hard fan.”

“.....”

Joseph stopped keying in the file’s details and stared at the black cat in Claude’s arms. He folded his arms and mulled for a moment. “It was him who did that?”

“Yes, Teacher.”

“Influential magician families are rich. Don’t you think so, Claude?”

“...Yes, Teacher.”

“Especially when it comes to spending money on such meaningless things. Why not just give that money straight to their idol. Consider it as a fee of up close interaction. He would surely be delighted... Hmm, let’s just recruit him as a knight apprentice on probation. Transfer him from the investigation department over to here.”

...The heck! How can there be such a vile and greedy Radiant Knight who even wants to cheat a kid’s money! Claude swore silently to himself.

But he didn’t show any of it on his face as he nodded. “Got it, I’ll arrange for it right away.”

“Good, we can save the cost of wiping his memory as well,” Joseph said as he continued to key in the details of his file.

“0113 S-rank zone: Norzin Upper City District 23rd Avenue 412, Bookstore.

Danger status: Friendly (Contact not advised).

Confidentiality status: Top secret (Follow-up investigation in progress).

Report: Bookstore owner believed to have longevity, living in seclusion and operating this bookstore. Business includes loaning and selling of books. Books contain a mysterious and strong power...”

Joseph pressed the enter key.

The contents of this classified file would be sent to the top brass of Secret Rite Tower. Afterwards, this information might flow to the parties that cooperated with Secret Rite Tower or people that might need this information.

Something that was recorded down had no way of being truly confidential. Being labeled top secret meant that that would be no more than ten people who would know about it.

What Joseph wanted to do was warn them to keep their distance from this bookstore.

Even though the bookstore owner was a friendly entity, there was no guarantee nothing might happen in the future given the way he accepted all customers and his habit of lending out books...

Of course, if they wanted to court disaster after seeing this file, Joseph could only wish them all the best.

“I’m fine, I’m really fine... Damn it, didn’t I send the file up? Are your eyeballs not working? Worried my ass. If I were to really die, there wouldn’t be anyone else left for you all to infuriate!” Joseph cursed to the receiver as he changed into his sleeping clothes.

“Do you understand that I’m off work now? The Truth Union

recently announced the new labor law two months ago. I want to demand more pay if you are doing this!”

“Alright, I’m done talking. I’ve something to attend to. That will be all.”

Beep.

Only

Joseph turned off the receiver and exhaled. He picked up ***Seed Of The Abyss*** and browsed through it slightly, able to verify that the demon sword’s conveyed mood was now serene and cheerful.

The fixed phone in the hall suddenly started ringing.

“Bullshit, who is it this time?” Joseph massaged his temple, placed down the book and strode out of the room. “Melissa, remember to drink your milk.”

A tall slender lady with beautiful red curls stuck her head out from the adjacent room and said petulantly, “Got—It—Dad. I’m not a kid anymore.”

Joseph’s voice got more and more distant, “Really? My sweet daughter, having you drink milk isn’t to make you grow taller. Very soon, you wouldn’t be able to get married off anymore.”

Melissa pouted. As she turned her head, she noticed the book on the table.

Eh? Since when did this muscle-head learn to read books? wondered Melissa as she picked it up out of curiosity.

Chapter 22 Remember To Drink Your Milk

Chapter 22: Remember To Drink Your Milk

Melissa was the daughter of the former Great Radiant Knight and current intelligence branch section chief, Joseph.

She had inherited her mother's curly red hair. When her lustrous sleek hair was let down, Melissa looked like a beautiful mermaid, yet when it was tied up, she could look like a valiant knight.

As she was at home, Melissa was dressed very casually in a white lace blouse, a high-waisted blue skirt, black tights, and beige slippers. She was the image of an independent and vibrant young girl.

Due to her mother's early passing, she had stayed together with her father in this house at the upper city district's 1st Avenue.

Looking at their ages, Joseph was actually old enough to be Melissa's grandfather. But, when it came to knights that drew power from the aether and made it their own, age wasn't a real measure of anything.

This 16-year-old girl was an Abnormal-rank knight and a combat branch squad leader of Secret Rite Tower.

"Strange... Why is he reading a book?" Melissa mumbled as she scrutinized the book suspiciously. "I've never seen him read any books, not even when he was still a Great Radiant Knight."

Melissa's brows furrowed as she racked her brains. Joseph was frequently away because of his duty and Melissa practically stayed alone in this house. The few times she remembered her father reading was only when he was forced to.

The recent labor law announcement was one such example. At that

time, Joseph had spent a lot of time studying various regulations in order to find some way that benefited him the most. Beyond that, Joseph didn't even bother reading anything.

Filled with curiosity, Melissa glanced at the book in her hands titled ***Seed Of The Abyss*** and flipped it open.

Her finger skimming through the book gradually slowed and the look in her eyes changed as she got increasingly immersed within it.

“God damn it, stop disturbing me! I may be a cripple, but that bookstore owner didn't have a single bit of aetheric traces on him, yet he made me lose consciousness. Doesn't that tell you all the sort of power he possesses? All I can say is, just maintain a degree of respect and don't go courting disaster. In any case, I won't be the one going to save your sorry asses!”

Joseph's voice got closer and there was even the sound of a wall being kicked mixed in.

Melissa looked up suddenly, freeing herself from that ancient and enthralling world that had drawn her in. It felt as if her soul had been drawn out and returned back into her body.

Melissa shook her head vigorously and quickly put down the book. She then moved back to her original position from her memory before pretending like she was returning back to her bedroom.

“Melissa.”

Melissa nervously turned her head over.

“Remember to drink your milk,” reminded Joseph.

“.....”

Melissa put on a fake smile and nodded before returning to her room and shutting the door shut.

“Phew...” Melissa heaved a deep sigh as many questions popped up in her mind.

“Who wrote that book? Is the main character the elf prince, Candela, who later became the demon sword Candela? Why was it so exciting and realistic? Is it a biography or a novel?”

However, the most important point was that she hadn’t finished reading it! Just a little more and she would have seen a very exciting point!

Melissa laid in bed feeling unsettled and kept mumbling to herself as she tossed and turned. “Never imagined an old fogey like dad would read this kind of book. Looks like my previous judgments of him were wrong.”

But from the exchange Melissa overheard, this book seemed related to an extremely confidential place. One that most people would have no way of getting any information about.

Melissa laid in bed with her eyes shut. After a long time, she finally opened her eyes, and got up to turn on her personal computer. “What does it have to do with anything? It’s merely a bookstore... at most, the owner is very powerful. If that’s the case, I wouldn’t go over and push my luck.”

She extended her hand, gathering the aether to form a key. “Database key—access authority—S-rank.”

Aether was the bridge between reality and illusion.

Melissa touched the key to the web page, and opened up in a brand new interface before her eyes was a huge database. “Thank you mother,” said Melissa, putting her palms together.

She then started to skim through these files she had requested.

Before her death, Melissa’s mother was a Great Radiant Knight and had access authorization to Secret Rite Tower’s database.

Her account had been left to Melissa as her mother’s expectations for her. This was public knowledge as well, just that Melissa had never used it before.

Of course, if she were to really do something and the archives in the

database were changed, the female knight Melissa would be branded as a traitor.

“Ah! Found it! The bookstore!”

Melissa’s eyes glowed like sparking crystals as she stared at the information on the screen.

Upon staring at it for a while, she muttered, “Friendly? If that’s the case, I can go check it out...”

Melissa made her decision and shut off the computer before her sights fell onto the cup of milk on the table.

“Humph.”

She picked up the cup and drained it in one gulp.

Under the dim lighting, Wilde was taking notes with his quill pen.

He removed half of his mask, revealing a sinister and completely disfigured face. The other half of his mask had already completely fused together with his flesh, becoming a part of his face.

While his appearance was terrifying, the way in which he studied earnestly slightly lessened the frightening atmosphere.

Placed in front of Wilde was Lin Jie’s unpublished work. During this period of research, Wilde had already filled out three notebooks worth of notes!

“It really is an extensive depth of unfathomable knowledge! As expected of Mr Lin!” Wilde lamented as he put down the quill and picked up the notebook to go through his latest revision.

Through his study and research, he roughly understood the general idea of *Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites and Ceremonies* .

Only

This book mainly recorded the faith known as the Corpse Devouring Sect as well as the important rites and rituals they performed. It also included information of the materials needed to process, mix, and finally turn them into offerings.

From Wilde's shallow summary, he could see that most of these materials were corpses and the methods of processing included draining the blood, mincing, flaying, burning, and even ingestion of viscera. All of these were exceptionally cruel and anyone reading it would tremble in fear.

Even a black magician like Wilde found it a little hard to bear.

But within this demented idea was a strangely compatible rationale. This book undoubtedly contained a tremendous sacrificial system.

Specific dates and time with stringent procedures, each sacrifice had its own significance and embodied a part of this culture.

"If *Devil's Language* was the tip of the iceberg, then *Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites and Ceremonies* lets me finally see a tiny facet of this frightening lost culture!"

Wilde put on his mask once more and muttered with fascination, "This is just too enthralling... I've to thank Mr Lin for everything. I've already prepared a gift that he will definitely like."

Chapter 23 Wheres The Circuit Breaker

Chapter 23: Where's The Circuit Breaker

“...The storm weather warning has been upgraded to red. Passage to Norzin’s lower city districts has already been closed and traffic in Norzin’s upper city districts has come to a standstill. Many industries have been hit hard, and there’s been severe infrastructural damage.”

“At present, the city’s sewerage system is operating at full capacity and alleviating some ponding. However, according to expert estimates, this is merely an inadequate measure. If torrential rain continues on for another month, a third of Norzin might be submerged.”

“Rolle Resource Development Company proposed utilizing the lower city district to construct a more comprehensive sewerage network. This would be a huge project, thus the company would appeal to everyone and hope to gain the support of the authorities.”

“Experts say that the main cause of this torrential rain comes from a cold air mass originating from the Northern Highlands...”

Lin Jie listened to the news broadcasts from his neighbor’s television as he worked tirelessly to mop up the puddles on the floor.

This torrential downpour had already gone on for close to an entire week. Just as the reports had mentioned, ponding on the roads was more than 30 centimeters high the previous day, when the situation was at its worst.

To say that traffic had been completely paralyzed wasn’t exactly true because paddle boats and other water-way means of transport could still be used.

After waking up in the morning and coming downstairs, Lin Jie saw that some water had seeped through the crack at the bottom of the door, carrying leaves, branches, and other such debris into the bookstore.

Fortunately, the situation wasn't that severe. The water level outside hadn't continued to rise due to the drainage system, just that some drifting plastic bags had caught on the door, causing water to flow in.

Splish splash.

Lin Jie squeezed the last of the accumulated water out of the door and stretched his back. "It's finally done, how tiring."

He placed the mop aside and admired the sparkly clean floor.

"I wonder if that little cat found its way home. Roaming around outside in such horrible weather is rather dangerous," mused Lin Jie as he thought about the black cat that had run away from his door on the day of Joseph's visit.

The kind-natured Lin Jie couldn't help but sigh worriedly.

Sounds from the television suddenly ceased. A string of curses ensued, followed by some loud banging noises.

Lin Jie could imagine how agitated the next-door shop owner was right now. Lin Jie went over to the adjacent wall, cleared his throat and asked, "Hi, do you need help?"

The unit next door was an audio-video store that sold discs and various digital products. But as a dealer of second-hand wares, the quality of their products could be a little lacking. Their business was similar to Lin Jie's own shabby bookstore and it was rare to even see more than two customers on most days.

"It's alright, thanks," the next-door owner replied, as another two loud thuds were heard.

Bam! Bam!

Colin Ackerman glared furiously at the television and cursed under his breath, "Fucking hell... Damned television! Damned rain! Oh god, can't you save me!"

He inspected the television set and realized that there weren't any problems. Therefore, it was probably an issue with the circuits or power source. Colin then checked the wiring but didn't find any problem either.

It can only be a trip then . Colin thought to himself. But my door is nearly submerged and the circuit breaker is outside...

Due to the natural topography of the area, the audio-visual store had a slightly lower position compared to the bookstore. Colin frowned at the thought of having to wade through water and he really wished he could give a piece of his mind to those people that had designed the sewerage system.

"Wait a moment, maybe the fella next door could help," muttered Colin.

He might have just rejected the neighbor's offer for help because he was embarrassed, but Colin knew that the fella next door was a do-gooder that would basically help anyone if it was within his power.

"Um, cough cough, are you still there?" Colin probed.

The voice of the young man next door responded, "I'm here, do you need my help somewhere?"

Colin nodded to himself then explained, "It's like this, you should have already heard it. I'm having some problems with my television and I suspect the circuit breaker outside tripped. I'm a little tied up here so could you help me have a look?"

Since this fella liked helping others, having him do a little favor didn't seem like a problem. Moreover, the television had been broadcasting the news free of charge for him in the last couple of days.

Naturally, Lin Jie didn't mind helping. Truth be told, he was bored and wanted to find something to do.

“No problem, if it’s the circuit breaker, I remember that it’s...” Lin Jie prepared to step out. Suddenly, a black and fuzzy humanoid silhouette appeared through the glass window of the door.

Lin Jie experienced the strange yet familiar sensation once again.

“Ah, it’s you! You’ve come.” Lin Jie was slightly astonished. He never imagined that this hidden hand would appear again after just a few days. “Is something the matter? Or are you urging me to loan out more books?”

The black silhouette at the door shook its head and pointed to the left.

Lin Jie turned and noticed the figure was pointing at the next door audio-visual store. Joining the dots, he came to an understanding. “You are saying that you want to help me?”

The black silhouette nodded.

Lin Jie smiled and felt that this hidden hand was rather cute. Previously, it didn’t have an actual body and could only use wet stains to express itself. Now though, it had taken on a shadow-like appearance.

This was probably the result of loaning out all those books—it had previously said that loaning out books would benefit it.

And now, it appears to lend me a hand as a show of thanks? Wasn’t it already a pact from the beginning and I’m supposed to be paying the price, yet it even came to say thanks instead. What’s going on? Why does it feel like a polite child? Rejecting the offer might hurt its feelings, mulled Lin Jie to himself.

“Thank you then, the circuit breaker is... Um... I can’t seem to remember clearly,” Lin Jie turned to the wall and raised his voice, “Where’s the circuit breaker?”

Colin replied at once, “It’s on the right wall near the back door of my store. Help me see if it’s a trip. If it is, all you have to do is flip the switch down.”

Only

“No problem,” said Lin Jie.

At this moment, Colin saw his television crackle and light up. The news broadcast was already over and a commercial was airing. “It’s working! Thank you very much!”

“You’re welcome.”

Lin Jie smiled and nodded at the black silhouette. Through the glass window, the silhouette started to fade, as if it was gradually backing away through the curtain of rain.

Pleased with the solved problem, Colin slumped back into his sofa and picked up his remote controller to switch through channels. While watching the changing scenes on the television, Colin’s face suddenly stiffened as he broke out in cold sweat.

He recalled the entire exchange with the bookshop owner next door up until the television lit up.

His voice had only sounded from the same spot all this time...

Chapter 24 Dream-catcher

Chapter 24: Dream-catcher

“Yet another day of helping someone,” Lin Jie sighed contently as he returned to his seat behind the counter.

There really weren’t many kindhearted people in society nowadays.

Lin Jie knew that the next-door neighbor was actually a bum that spends the whole day lying down in front of the television doing nothing. Surely, some would wonder if there was any point in helping such a person.

But when conducting oneself with integrity, one ought to consider the long-term. A store’s branding should be built up from the most minute of aspects.

Just like how he gained his loyal customers because he was good at understanding others, offering them counsel, and becoming their friends.

To him, the next door audio-video store was an important customer source.

Only with comparison would there be a deeper understanding.

Just imagine if a customer of the next door store asked, the boss of the audio-video store could say that Lin Jie was a good person. Thus, those people would have positive connotations of the neighboring bookstore owner.

Perhaps, it might make them consider coming over to take a look.

Haa... I hope the boss next door can understand my kind intentions and help bring me some customers.

The bell on the door slightly tinkled, accompanied by the pitter-patter of rain which became isolated once more when the door closed.

Lin Jie looked up and was momentarily stunned before he flashed a slightly surprised smile, “Old Wil, why are you back so quickly this time?”

It was Wilde who had arrived. He was in a suit as before, just that he now had on a slightly longer cloak, approximately long enough to hide his arms.

Lin Jie always felt Old Wil had a good dress sense. His style was like an English gentleman’s and today’s attire seemed to have an air of mystery.

Wilde removed his hat and did a half bow before heading to the seat in front of the counter. Taking out the book, he said excitedly, “Thank you for your generosity, I have made great progress and it feels as if inspiration is coursing through my entire body. I feel that I will be able to make a breakthrough before long.”

He felt that he was one step away from Supreme-rank. Even though the gulf was still huge, Wilde knew that it was no longer unattainable.

All he needed was to refine the concept of his soul and find a language that belonged to himself.

Lin Jie clapped and said encouragingly, “Breaking through the current stage really isn’t easy. Let me congratulate you in advance. If you need help, I will do my utmost.”

Wilde placed the book on the table. “I’m extremely grateful, Mr Lin. I’ve benefited greatly from your work, but now it is time for me to properly express my gratitude.”

Wilde had previously given Lin Jie a stone gargoyle, but compared to the help Lin Jie had given him, the gargoyle’s value was negligible.

Therefore, he wanted to give Lin Jie a present he had spent two years preparing. This present has also been the reason why he had laid low for the past two years.

Only such a gift could match the goodwill he had received these

past two years.

Wilde had his own honor and principles even though he was a merciless black wizard and firmly believed in repaying kindness with kindness.

"I was already very pleased with your previous gift. I'll really have to reconsider accepting it if you are going to present me with something precious this time," said Lin Jie as he eyed the stone statue on the table.

Wilde knew that Mr Lin was just giving him solace.

'Very pleased?' ...Clearly Mr Lin is being modest and sparing a thought for my feelings when what I gave him was clearly of little value compared to the guidance he provided. Mr Lin is truly a great person indeed!

"You don't have to hesitate. Truth be told, it has little usable value for me but perhaps it could be of greater use to you," Wilde insisted. "I would be really saddened if you don't accept it."

Since Wilde had put it this way, Lin Jie couldn't decline. "We've talked so much but I still don't know what it is you prepared. How about letting me see it first?"

Wilde took a deep breath and carefully took out an ornament that looked like a wind chime from inside his cloak.

It had a circular frame created out of twigs with pearls embedded between the interweaving strings, forming a beautiful and complicated net. Right in the middle was a small hole with an azure blue gemstone as its only adornment. Beneath the frame hung a few soft feathers.

"A dream-catcher?" Lin Jie raised an eyebrow. He never imagined that this would be Old Wil's gift.

As a doctoral student in folklore studies, Lin Jie's research wasn't just on native customs. Often, he would have to study and refer from various sources, and thus he learned a little about the folklore and customs of other countries.

In Native American culture, dream-catchers were considered a sacred item or charm. Native Americans believed that the night air was full of dreams and only a dream-catcher could filter out the nightmares and capture sweet dreams.

Only good dreams could pass the hole in the center and flow downwards along the feathers whereas bad dreams would be caught in the net and fade away when the sun rose.

There were some legends saying that the pearls on a dream-catcher were the energy and wisdom captured during sleep and could strengthen one's communication with the spiritual world.

In short, it was a blessing full of mystery and mysticism.

Lin Jie hadn't imagined that such items would exist in this world.

"You are really knowledgeable indeed," Wilde sighed with admiration as he raised the dream-catcher in his hand up, "It's a dream-catcher."

He wasn't surprised that Lin Jie recognized it because dream-catchers were tools of sorcery. Although not commonly seen, they weren't that rare either, at least in the eyes of a Destructive-rank black magician.

Furthermore, the greatest value of a dream-catcher didn't come from itself but rather from the dream within the net.

This was also the first time Lin Jie had seen an authentic hand-made dream-catcher. Dream-catchers in shops were mostly gaudy mass-produced ornaments that had little to no artistic value whereas the one held by Wilde was clearly hand-woven.

Only

Moreover, the recent torrential weather made it stifling inside the bookstore and Lin Jie hadn't been sleeping well.

Old Wil is being really thoughtful here! It's not the gift but the thought that counts! That's what true friendship is!

Lin Jie was rather touched. He stood up, took the dream-catcher from Old Wil and sighed with satisfaction. "It's just what I need. Thank you, Old Wil."

Wilde felt a great weight was lifted from his mind. "It's my honor for this to be of use to you," said Wilde with a smile.

An incomparably beautiful dream was caught in this dream-catcher's net, but at the same time, a terrifying danger existed within it. One without a Supreme-rank's level mental strength couldn't enter the dream and if they did, their soul might be pulverized instantly.

However, for a high-level existence, the dream would bring about rare enjoyment and pleasure.

"May you have sweet dreams."

Chapter 25 Sky Wolf

Chapter 25: Sky Wolf

Boom!

A tall building collapsed as a body hurtled into it. Amidst the rain of falling debris, that figure rapidly changed her posture mid-air and fell towards the nearest building at the side.

“Damn it, they have magicians amongst them!” Kaiyi stabilized herself by grabbing onto an exposed pipe, then shouted towards Ji Zhixiu, “Watch out for the familiar!”

An incantation was chanted and a purple flash ensued.

“Hiss——”

A giant serpent extended its wings and shot upwards at an astounding speed, revealing bloody jaws and sharp fangs.

Ji Zhixiu’s eyes narrowed as she threw her cane, embedding the blade edge into the wall at the side.

“Hiss!”

Glowing yellow eyes fixed its gaze on the hunter as the giant serpent viciously bit down towards Ji Zhixiu!

Jaws came clamping down, but it was suddenly halted. A silver furred paw grabbed onto the serpent’s upper jaw as knife-like claws cut its skin and drew blood. The second paw caught hold of the serpent’s lower jaw.

With force exerted to both the top and bottom at the same time, the giant serpent’s jaws were gradually being torn apart. Its body writhed as it struggled frantically but it was no use as its body was mercilessly split down from the middle.

Splat! Blood and innards painted the wall red.

“What?!” The magician that had summoned the familiar staggered backwards in shock. The color in his face had drained as he cried on in disbelief, “How is this possible? How can she maintain her rationality with this degree of beast mutation! God damn it, I thought they were just rumors and Heris would inform us if he knew. He’s just making use of us!”

“What’s the use of finding out now? We are already on the battlefield!” exclaimed another magician beside him. “Don’t panic! The blood of the Sky Wolf fears fire!”

“But it’s raining now...”

“There’s no point overthinking it! Prepare the gunpowder! Hold steady, she’s just a Pandemonium-rank. We can win!”

“Howl...” On the rooftop, a silver wolf as huge as a hill stood on its hind legs, claw glistening with blood as its fur fluttered in the wind. Staring at the magicians with a piercing gaze, a raspy female voice escaped its mouth. “There’s no escape for all of you!”

In the distance, Kaiyi and Marcus landed on the ground. “Miss...” muttered Kaiyi excitedly as she gazed at the beautiful and dangerous silver wolf up high.

Ji Zhixiu no longer had any resemblance to a human and had completely delved into the beast mutation state. If not for the fact she could still speak, any hunter seeing her would think that it was a powerful dream beast.

This was the power that all hunters yearn for! Kaiyi had a premonition that the young mistress would bring about a new world for hunters!

But who exactly is the mysterious tenant on 23rd Avenue that brought about all of this and helped the young mistress? What exactly is his motive?

“Don’t think about it too much,” Marcus broke her train of thoughts. Patting Kaiyi on her shoulder, he continued, “We just have to follow and share in the glory that comes after.”

Kaiyi exhaled slowly as her fingers turned a shade of black. “You are absolutely right. Come on, the battle still has to go on.”

The two of them turned into blurred streaks, darting at high speed towards where the magicians were.

With gunpowder in their hands, the magicians chanted a flame enchantment.

“Flame Enchantment – Blaze Activation!”

Behind them, aether condensed, forming large quantities of elemental fire. White balls of flame transformed into a rain of fire that shot towards Ji Zhixiu.

The silver wolf howled and leaped away, dodging a flurry of densely packed streaks of fire as she landed on all fours and started running. Another barrage of flaming arrows struck the ground beside her, creating an explosion that caused her to stumble and singe some fur.

Elemental flames continued to rain down, melting down constructions in the nearby area due to the high heat.

Ji Zhixiu howled in pain even though the wounds on her body had started to close up as she continued her mad dash, knocking down a building and concealing herself in the cloud of dust and debris.

She knew that the magicians Heris employed weren’t weak. All three of them were elite Pandemonium-rank magicians.

Who could have imagined that magicians who had always despised hunters would cooperate with one?

If not for the gift and guidance she had received from Mr Lin, Ji Zhixiu would have been killed without a doubt.

Heris was worthy of being the leader of a large hunter group indeed. First, he had betrayed the second leader Kaji before joining forces with magicians. Moreover, he had been hiding behind the scenes all this time...

But it didn't matter. In the sky, "Steel Resolve" floated above her, covering the entire area. She had already discovered Heris' position.

A second enchantment of the magicians was already reaching its end. A huge blaze continuously warped before eventually turned into a spiraling three-meter-long spear.

"Flame Enchantment – Katya's Spear!"

Whoosh——

The twisting spear of white flames shot forth, creating sonic booms and dissolving the rain into fog in an instant.

At this moment, Kaiyi and Marcus' sneak attack from the back was successful. Magicians were especially weak in close combat and the three magicians were instantly slain. The hunters turned around and watched the flame spear strike the body of the large silver wolf and explode.

Boom!

"Miss!"

——

Hands in pockets, Heris watched the urban district in front of him that was encased in a boundary enchantment. Flames flickered in the rain as explosions sounding like muffled thunder passed through the boundary. In this torrential downpour, no one would pay any attention.

Small and large battles like this had already occurred in Norzin dozens of times.

Damage suffered by the buildings in this battle would be blamed on the torrential rain that would wash away all blood.

Heris had the look of a matured middle-aged man. Wrinkles around the corner of his eyes and a head of gray hair with strands of white made him seem stern and cold.

Behind him stood a young man holding a black umbrella.

“Uri, someone is helping her,” muttered Heris. “I never knew there was such a person in Norzin. Controlling beast mutation... even Wilde has no way to do something like this.”

“Mm,” the umbrella wielding young man groaned in acknowledgment.

“Have you seen Wilde?”

“Nope.”

“Go pay him a visit. He’s still your teacher after all. Someone from Secret Rite Tower informed me that he made an appearance at 23rd Avenue. Perhaps, he might have some clues.”

“Yes.”

Only

“Also...” Heris was interrupted midway.

“Howl!”

A small crack in the aether appeared in mid-air as a silver wolf leapt out, moving so quickly that it was just a streak of silver.

It was Ji Zhixiu!

The Sky Wolf’s blood was surging in her body and this high level beast mutation granted her special characteristics of a dream beast.

Moreover, the Sky Wolf had the reputation for being able to leap through space and time!

Steel Resolve bestowed her with a certain degree of foresight. Just as the flame spear was about to strike her, she had leapt to the coordinates she had fixed her sights on!

Chapter 26 With My Carpet Of Needles And My Crown Of Snow

Chapter 26: With My Carpet of Needles and My Crown of Snow

Heris' cold indifferent attitude changed into a look of surprise. In the next moment, the silver wolf had knocked him to the ground and had ripped open his shoulder.

He drew out a dagger and stabbed viciously into the silver wolf's eyes, tightening his muscles as he held the silver wolf's paw in a vice-like grip. "Uri!" he growled.

The young man pushed back by the shock-wave stumbled backwards twice. Blood flowed from his forehead, but his gaze was stern as he shouted, "Confusion Technique! Flash Technique!"

It was clear from the way he invoked his spells that he was of a much higher level than those three other magicians that had died unnatural deaths.

A black magician's power of language depended on his innate skill as well as his creativity. How refined and simple a magician's incantation would illustrate his mastery of magic. A simpler incantation represented a higher level of mastery.

For example, Wilde's teacher, a black magician on the fringes of Supreme-rank, was able to complete the discharge of magic with just ordinary words.

Ji Zhixiu howled. Her mind became caught in a confusing vortex and her vision had gone white from the stabbing.

As Wilde's disciple, Uri had tempered his skills in many battles and was adept at providing the best support.

Heris hooked his hand upward, breaking the silver wolf's front paw. He pulled out the dagger and flipped the huge wolf to the ground.

"Damn it!" Ji Zhixiu felt her whole world tumbling. Her spine seemed to be on the verge of snapping and a great sense of danger engulfed her.

"Steel Resolve!" recited Ji Zhixiu.

The octopus-like spiritual mass in the sky that had been following her extended its tentacles to cover her nose and mouth, drawing away the negative statuses.

Ji Zhixiu came to her senses and through her bloodied vision, saw a cold gleam rapidly approaching her.

The hairs on her body stood on end as she quickly opened up her jaw, inclining her head and biting the dagger that was stabbing towards her.

Squelch!

The dagger penetrated her cheek and got stuck between teeth and flesh.

Ji Zhixiu's cold eyes were filled with killing intent as she twisted her head and tore Heris' arm while her huge body rolled forward. A sickening bone-crunching noise erupted from Heris' body.

Ji Zhixiu then extended her arms and clawed Heris' body from both sides.

"Flame Incantation – Putrefying Sun!"

With ample time for preparation, Uri finally completed his chant.

A dazzling illusory sun appeared above Ji Zhixiu, shining down on her. Her flesh and skin started swelling and squirming as foul black smoke started oozing from her body where the sun rays hit. It was a terrifying power and Ji Zhixiu felt as though her body would swell up and explode at any moment.

Visually, this was simply a nauseating sight.

Danger! Extreme danger! Run away! These were the only thoughts in Ji Zhixiu's mind as she immediately chose to do a forceful space leap once more.

Her body that could no longer bear the strain completely transformed in the process of the leap.

Plop!

She didn't even know where she landed either.

"Haa... Haa..." Uri was panting heavily as his hands limply formed a gesture to toss the Putrefying Sun within the sealed up boundary. "Mr Heris... Are you alright?"

He stood up, looked ahead and was met with an alarming sight.

White Wolves' leader, Heris, laid on the ground covered in blood with a severed arm flung several meters away. He appeared to be at death's door.

"I'm fine." Unexpectedly, the man's voice was as calm as ever.

Swaying heavily, he got to his feet. Flesh and muscle rapidly regenerated and an arm grew out of his bloodied stump. Even more surprisingly, another arm grew out from a wound on his body.

Heris glanced at it for a moment and then tore off his extra arm.

This was a common occurrence for a hunter with a high concentration of sordid blood—physical mutation.

If Heris didn't do a periodic 'cleansing' of his body, he would become a multi-limbed and many-eyed abomination in no time.

"Seems like that tenant at 23rd Avenue is even more powerful than we imagined."

"Are you talking about the power to transcend space-time?"

“No,” Heris shook his head. “What I’m saying is that she could use Ruen’s soul to access his intelligence network, precisely determine our position, and also dispel your mind-confusion technique. This sort of power really interests me.”

The two thoroughly-drenched figures gazed at the severely ruined area within the boundary after being ravaged by Uri’s Putrefying Sun for some time.

“Unfortunately, I have more pressing matters to attend to now. You go take a look, Uri. He’s more important than Wilde.”

“Yes.” Uri nodded.

Heris opened his palm, revealing an egg that looked like a gemstone.

“Say, Uri, what do you think will hatch from it?” muttered Heris as he gazed at it with an obsessed look on his face.

“...A dream beast.”

“No, not at all. It’s a god, a true god.”

Lin Jie closed his bookstore, locked the door, and bolted the windows. He then inspected all his bookshelves once and kept his register log and accounts book.

Finally satisfied, he picked up the dream-catcher Wilde had given and headed upstairs to get ready for bed.

The second storey’s layout was very different from the first. The first storey was brimming with books while the second storey was where all the living amenities were.

Besides the washroom, kitchen, and bedroom, there was even a little corner specially for working out.

As he didn’t go out much and spent most of his time cooped inside the bookstore, Lin Jie had no choice but to draw up a weekly

workout schedule for himself.

Even though the degree of exercises wasn't that challenging, he couldn't allow himself to really become an idle bum.

Due to the incessant rain as well as slight leakage from the ceiling, the entire second story had a damp vibe.

Lin Jie felt he had been negligent and had actually forgotten to get some lime desiccant to absorb moisture. "Haa, I'll go get some when the rain stops."

Lin Jie opened the door to his bedroom, revealing only a bed, a desk, and a chair in this narrow space.

Stacks of paper containing his research resources piled up on the table. All of these were a slight investigation he did during the two years he spent assimilating to life in Norzin.

Lin Jie found a nail, hammered it into the wall to form a simple hook and hung the beautiful dream-catcher on it. Its position was situated directly on top of his pillow.

If Lin Jie laid down, the tips feathers of the dream-catcher would be directly facing his eyes.

After keeping his tools, Lin Jie stretched his back, removed his clothes, turned off the lights, and laid down in bed.

He watched the swaying, gentle feathers above him.

"Let's hope it is really effective... sweet dreams." Lin Jie closed his eyes and darkness took over.

A dream?

Lin Jie blinked several times as he stared blankly at the vast white world before his eyes as fine snowflakes fell gently all around him.

He raised his head and saw lush green branches, covered by snow.

A twisted tree trunk like an artery sprouted from the ground with a massive canopy that seemed as if it could block out the sun. A vast bed of white iris flowers on the ground swayed with the wind.

Beneath it, a silver-haired lady was lying with her eyes shut.

Her beautiful features were like pure moonlight and she was wrapped in a light, white fabric. A pair of slim, blemish-free pale legs peeked out from beneath the fabric.

Immediately, Lin Jie thought of some words he had heard before from a source he had long forgotten—— *With my carpet of needles and my crown of snow.*

Chapter 27 Person In A Dream

Chapter 27: Person In A Dream

Falling snow, a hill full of iris flowers, a huge ancient tree, and a sleeping beauty. It seemed as if everything Lin Jie saw was bathed in a warm glow, as if his vision was through a soft filter. All of it constituted a fairy-tale-like picturesque scene.

This is indeed an incomparably beautiful dream... Old Wilde wasn't lying, mused Lin Jie as he observed the bed of flowers before stooping down to pluck an iris and smelling it.

Swirling the flower, Lin Jie noticed that its petals were pure and elegant. Regardless of sight, smell or touch, this flower couldn't be any more realistic.

A lucid dream?

Occasionally, Lin Jie would also have dreams where he could maintain his clear-headedness and even be aware he was dreaming. These sorts of dreams were called lucid dreams.

In this state, a person dreaming would have full control over his actions, thoughts, and even memory. Some could even make their own dream feel no different from actual reality.

Even though it sounds really incredible, in reality, the phenomenon of lucid dreams wasn't that rare and a person could train themselves to be capable of having lucid dreams.

Lin Jie wasn't someone who could easily achieve lucid dreaming. Based on his memory, he only had a handful of dreams where he was aware he was dreaming.

Now, he had entered a lucid dreaming state after having just hung up the dream-catcher. Lin Jie was still skeptical of the dream-catcher's effect.

Perhaps, the spider web design and Old Wilde's words had induced subtle psychological suggestions, resulting in this dream realm.

Lin Jie felt this was the most logical and scientific explanation.

Of course, he wasn't someone who needed to always get to the bottom of something rationally and all these were just his passing thoughts. As a romanticist who would brew a pot of tea while waiting for an unknown customer to come visit during a rainstorm, Lin Jie was still rather willing to believe that this was a mystical gift from Old Wilde.

Nevertheless, since this was a dream, could he do as he pleased? Lin Jie cast a probing gaze at the maiden lying beneath the tree.

He was rather curious as to why of all things he could dream of, he just had to dream of a woman. Of course, he couldn't say that this was something he wouldn't dream of as he was a man after all.

But logically speaking, a character in his dream shouldn't be so vivid yet completely unfamiliar.

In the end, it's just a dream. Anything is possible in a dream right? Lin Jie mused to himself.

He slowly brushed aside the bed of flowers and inched his way to the tree. Lin Jie wanted to see exactly how this "person of his dreams" looked like.

Lin Jie noticed this lady was even prettier up close than he imagined. She had an air of ethereal beauty, as if she was a sculpture of the Roman goddess Venus.

Long silver hair sprawled over the bed of flowers like a silk curtain. Her flawless snow-white body heaved lightly as she slept and even her long eyelashes like fluttering butterfly wings were pure white. In a sense, it seemed as if she was wearing a white crown of thorns.

As expected of a dream. This is simply a scene out of an oil painting. Lin Jie sighed with admiration.

He hadn't said anything all this time and merely muttered in his

heart as he couldn't bear to disrupt this dream-like vibe.

But... since this was a dream, he could allow himself to be a little more unbridled.

Lin Jie stooped down and brushed aside a few strands of silver hair, revealing the lady's ear. Gently, he slipped the white iris flower on top of her left ear.

Lin Jie had never done such a mushy action to any lady before back in reality, let alone to a stranger that he had just met.

But since this was a dream, he just did as he wanted. Moreover, he was just presenting a gift because he was mesmerized by her beauty... even though the flower was her own.

Lin Jie set the flower in place and had just straightened his back when he suddenly realized a pair of silver-white eyes staring back at him.

“!”

He took two steps back in a rush.

“Rustle...”

A sudden gust blew, causing the iris flowers to rustle in the wind and glow. Snow-white flower petals floated up and the massive tree creaked loudly like an antique pipe organ.

The entire dream world seemed to spin.

The silver-haired lady wrapped in light, white fabric stood up from the bed of flowers as she glanced at Lin Jie with a look of bewilderment and suspicion.

Lin Jie suddenly realized her height was beyond what he expected.

He hadn't realized it when she was leaning against the tree, but when this lady stood up, Lin Jie had to raise his head in order to see her entire figure.

What this meant, was that the ‘person in his dream’ was at least two meters tall...

As expected, anything is possible in a dream.

Or, it could be Lin Jie’s senses being somewhat disoriented because he was in a dream.

“Who are you?” asked the tall ‘person in the dream’ as she eyed Lin Jie. Her gentle voice that had a matured womanly charm was strangely captivating.

Lin Jie was momentarily dazed. He hadn’t expected such a question from the other party. On the contrary, he had been about to ask this question and see what sort of interesting answer this character assembled from his subconscious mind would give.

He totally never expected this person to steal his move as well as his question...

But when he thought about it, wouldn’t a conversation between a ‘person dreaming’ and a ‘person in the dream’ be even more interesting?

Lin Jie pondered for a moment and smiled. “Someone currently dreaming.”

The ‘person in his dream’ reached out to touch the iris flower on her ear and said, “Naturally, you are the one having the dream.”

She actually knows that she’s in a dream?

Lin Jie immediately found it interesting. He could have a lucid dream and the person in his dream was aware she was in a dream. Would she also know that she didn’t exist in reality?

But unless this person he was dreaming of was real and had linked up with this dream realm through some unknown means, this would all be complete nonsense.

Thus, the person in his dreams was just a figment of his subconscious.

“At least this answer is true so it’s my turn to ask now.” Lin Jie skillfully turned the question into a sort of equal exchange. Clearing his throat, he asked, “Who are you? —You can’t say that you are a person in my dream.”

Perhaps because it was a dream, Lin Jie felt he was showing a slight bit of roguish tendencies.

The ‘person in his dream’ smiled, lifting her white satin skirt in a simple curtsy, “Silver, that’s my name.”

“Just your name?” replied Lin Jie.

“At least this answer is true.” Silver tilted her head and continued, “It’s my turn to ask, am I right?”

Lin Jie choked a little and nodded, clearly taken aback that she even knew how to ‘counterattack’.

Silver’s gaze fell as she said dejectedly, “I have been here for a long, long time. It’s been so long that I’ve already forgotten the significance of time. This is clearly a beautiful place, yet I often feel that it is too quiet. Could you tell me why I’m feeling this way?”

Isn’t this just loneliness? mused Lin Jie to himself.

Could he also provide his professional expertise in a dream?

Chapter 28 Philosopher

Chapter 28: Philosopher

Hearing Silver's glum voice and seeing her imploring silver eyes, 'Life Mentor' Lin Jie couldn't help wondering if this dream just happened to suit his tastes.

The tranquil and soothing ambiance of this romantic hill of irises was straight out of a fairy-tale. On top of that, there was a gorgeous lady for him to perform one of his favorite activities—dishing out chicken soup.

This dream is beyond beautiful!

Assuming that Lin Jie's ultimate dream of possessing all the books in the world had already been realized, then dishing out chicken soup to encourage others and lead them out of frustrations and difficult predicaments was another favorite pastime of his.

Seeing faces fraught with worry or those down in the dumps regain their positivity as if they had rediscovered their hopes and dreams would leave Lin Jie with a warm fuzzy feeling of self-satisfaction.

According to Lin Jie, there was no such thing as pure and simple kindheartedness in the world. Most of the time when Lin Jie helped others without asking for anything in return, he was actually gaining satisfaction from seeing the reactions of these people.

To put it simply, helping others in this way made Lin Jie happy. It was just regrettable that he only had a few regular customers that would return in fixed intervals due to his bookstore's dismal business, resulting in him missing out on a lot of joy in life.

Thus, being asked for help in his dream immediately appealed to Lin Jie's desire to dish out a dose of chicken soup.

Lin Jie pondered for a moment. Since this was a dream, he didn't have to be that cautious and thus, he extended a hand and said,

“How about sitting down and having a chat?”

A handshake, the universal symbol of expressing friendliness should be the most appropriate method here, Lin Jie thought to himself.

Silver had a slightly bewildered look on her face as she eyed Lin Jie’s hand and hesitated. Finally, she raised her own hand and gently placed it in his palm.

Soft, yet ice-cold.

This was what Lin Jie immediately felt. He tightened his grip on the lady’s hand, shook it, and sat down together on the flower bed where she had been lying on previously.

Lin Jie casually sat cross-legged and decided to first understand more about this “person in the dream” before he could tailor-make some chicken soup to soothe her soul.

“Have you always been alone in this dream?” asked Lin Jie.

Silver tilted her head, her long hair falling to cover the side of her face. “No one has ever come in before, nor has anyone been able to enter. You are the first.”

Ahh... So it’s a character design like Rapunzel...

Perhaps certain conditions make her unable to come into contact with others and she has to lead a life of solitude in eternal slumber within this beautiful flower bed.

It sounds very much like a fairy-tale.

Lin Jie felt that problems of this sort were the easiest to resolve. Compared to those that felt lonely in noisy and lively places, this issue seemed purely... like boredom.

This could be easily helped by fostering some hobbies. Of course, the most effective way of progress was to actually leave this place, make some friends, and fill one’s life with enrichment.

However, this being just a figment of his dream made Lin Jie

suddenly feel a little uncomfortable.

“It’s solitude and loneliness that is causing you to feel this way.” Lin Jie said softly, “It’s because you have always been all by yourself and never understood that you are lonely. You’ve even lost the semblance of time because you are always repeating the same things without any changes, resulting in a lack of novelty. All you can do is mulling over, and the more you ponder and think, the more lonely... and more painful it gets.

“Many other people are like this as well. Philosophers, poets for example. Such geniuses often think far and deep, yet are unable to understand and figure out their conundrums. And as a result, they ultimately choose to kill themselves.”

Therefore, the saying that ignorance is bliss was rather true..

“Thoughts...are the root of pain. Because they aren’t able to understand me, they fear me, and distance themselves from me,” Silver muttered, looking pensive.

Lin Jie was also being pensive as well. *Looks like there’s a bit of a ‘philosopher’ in her character design. From what it sounds like, she’s probably viewed as a freak in the eyes of ordinary people due to her way of thinking and finally chose to cut herself off from the world.*

Lin Jie suddenly made up his mind. So what if she was a person in his dream. There were never any conditions required when it came to making friends. Besides, a friend whom only he knew about was in a sense, romantic.

But whatever the case, he could only be a ‘pioneer’ when it came to helping this lonely lady before his eyes. Lin Jie looked towards Silver sincerely and said, “I think that I might perhaps be able to understand you.”

“I know,” replied Silver with a faint smile. “The moment you appeared in this dream meant that you understood me. You and I are of the same level... or perhaps, your ideas are of an even higher level than mine.”

Is this the way philosophers praise others? Speaking in such a roundabout way... is somewhat comforting.

Lin Jie had a slight suspicion that this was a mere flattery, but he cleared his throat and said, "If you put it this way, it means that I have been acknowledged by you... Now, I have a presumptuous... no, a most earnest request which I hope you can agree to."

When facing someone with such long periods of 'solitude', it was best to let them take the initiative. Otherwise, she would surely decline out of habit. Thus, Lin Jie had to make it difficult for her to decline straightaway.

Silver eyed Lin Jie hesitantly.

Lin Jie put on his warmest smile, "Would you be my friend?"

"Fr-fr-friend?"

Lin Jie nodded. "Yes, a friend. The reason you are feeling lonely is actually because you are bored. Don't you feel that this place is overly monotonous even if it is beautiful? Facing the same scenery all the time would result in it becoming tiresome sooner or later."

Chuckling, Lin Jie continued, "Have you tried making a friend before? Having someone to chat with and share some everyday trifles would be much merrier than being all alone."

When sharing was mentioned, the thought of recommending books came into Lin Jie's mind.

He was certainly tempted. However, due to it being a dream, he had previously only wanted to provide Silver with some psychological counsel. After all, they weren't in a bookstore and Lin Jie didn't have any books on hand...

Since this was a dream, I should be able to do something that isn't possible in ordinary situations. For example, maybe producing a book?

By relying on his memory, he should be able to completely recall a book...

Thud.

Lin Jie felt a weight appear on his thigh. He lowered his gaze and saw a hardcover copy of ***Grimm's Fairy Tales*** .

Lin Jie knew this book all too well. In his childhood, a translated copy of ***Grimm's Fairy Tales*** had been one of his study materials when he was learning Chinese. The story of Rapunzel was also from this book.

“Take this book... as a gift from meeting a friend for the first time,” said Lin Jie as he handed the book over.

Silver took the book, gently caressing its cover. “It’s been a long since anyone has given me a gift nor been willing to chat with me... I don’t have anything here except the tree, its fruits as well as the flowers and their nectar. If you are willing, you can choose one of these as my gift in return.”

Chapter 29 Iris Flowers

Chapter 29: Iris Flowers

Lin Jie looked up and realized there were some shimmering golden lights within the massive tree's canopy.

Being well hidden within the dense branches and leaves made it hard for Lin Jie to notice the fruits on this tree till now. Furthermore, his attention had been captured by the falling snow and beautiful iris flowers.

Silver had given a choice between four options—Tree, fruit, flower, and nectar.

Lin Jie thought about it and ruled out the tree first. He couldn't bring this tree away and this tree seemed to be rather useless to him.

Next, he eliminated the flowers for the same reason. Besides ornamental purposes, the flowers didn't seem to have any other use. Moreover, Lin Jie had plucked a flower and placed it on Silver's ear not too long ago. Now, having her give him a flower back seemed weird somehow.

Thus, he was only left with fruit and nectar.

Lin Jie pondered for a moment before gazing up at the glimmering, golden fruits hidden in the tree. "Can it be eaten directly?"

Lin Jie wasn't really interested in nectar, so why not try out how a fruit growing within a dream tasted like? This could also be considered a very unique experiment.

"Of course," replied Silver with a smile.

Snap .

A golden fruit shaped like an apple fell on its own the moment Silver spoke. Lin Jie reached out and caught it easily.

As Lin Jie twirled it in his hand, he noticed that this golden apple was an exquisite specimen. Every single curve seemed to be perfect, as if it had been drawn.

Here it is again, only something that can appear in a dream.

However, Lin Jie didn't care too much because it was now about to enter his stomach.

"Crunch, crunch."

Lin Jie completely devoured this little golden fruit in three bites. It was sweet, juicy, and wasn't that different from an ordinary apple, with the exception that it didn't have a core.

It seemed like the sense of taste in a dream was still based on reality. Hoping for an out-of-the world gustatory experience was simply wishful thinking.

At this moment, Lin Jie suddenly felt his mind becoming slightly fuzzy and sensed that he might be about to wake up.

"That fast..."

Lin Jie reckoned that time here was different from the time back in reality. Sometimes one might feel as if he had experienced many things in a dream, yet realized he had dozed off for merely five minutes after waking up.

And there were also times where one's dream might feel short but an entire night had already passed upon waking up.

Even though Lin Jie felt very regrettable, he couldn't control when he woke up from his sleep.

"I should go," Lin Jie said before standing up and extending a hand to Silver.

Silver smiled as she held his hand and pulled herself up before embracing Lin Jie lightly as her gentle yet magnetic voice sounded beside his ear. "I hope that we can still meet in a dream when the next night arrives."

Pandemonium-rank black magician and the disciple of 'Faceless Black-scaled Man' Wilde, Uri.

The entire black magician community knew that the Destructive-rank Wilde once had two disciples.

As for why this was stated in the past tense was because of Wilde's two disciples, one had already passed away while the other had chosen to betray Wilde.

The one that died had the name Charles, while the one still alive was Uri.

As of now, 'Blaze Envoy' Uri was Heris' cooperative partner as well as a core member of the black magician organization 'Scarlet Cult'.

"Perhaps choosing Heris this time was a wrong move, but choosing others would have been irrevocable," said Uri as he lit a cigarette but didn't puff on it. He was holding an umbrella and the suit he wore was all dirty and tattered.

He looked very young and could even pass off as a twenty-year-old. He had flaxen hair and a sharp skinny face fully littered with freckles and a black tattoo on the side. One of his arms was bandaged very tightly up to his palms.

This was the aftermath of being on the receiving end of Ji Zhixiu's surprise attack.

Being a hunter, Heris had the power of sordid blood that provided speedy regeneration and he could even regrow an arm without batting an eye. On the other hand, a black magician like Uri basically had a constitution no different from an ordinary person.

His body wasn't suited to sustain strong attacks nor did he possess regenerating capabilities. Moreover, this kind of injury wouldn't heal quickly enough only by relying on incantations and the best way to deal with such an injury was requesting for help from the Church of the Dome.

However, for the past three years, the Church of the Dome in Norzin had declared that they wouldn't provide black magicians with treatment.

The reason wasn't a standpoint issue. The Church of the Dome was only responsible for providing treatment and wasn't responsible for teaching people on how to conduct themselves. It was just that black magicians, especially the many low-level ones were generally... broke.

"Ji Zhixiu, and teach...Wilde both seem to have some relations with this bookstore owner on 23rd Avenue. It's like... their fates were rewritten in that place," muttered Uri.

He was well aware of the many serious injuries Wilde suffered back then. Furthermore, even if his teacher didn't die eventually, he probably wouldn't have reappeared given his pride. But who could have known that Wilde would actually appear and seemed to have gotten even stronger.

"Let's just hope it is an error with the intelligence report."

Uri turned his head to look at the middle-aged black magician Johann beside him. "Still remember your mission objectives?"

"Yes." The black magician lowered his head and continued, "Investigate the situation of the bookstore and its owner. Ascertain that person's level, appearance, and the layout of the bookstore."

"Go on then, bring back some good news," Uri ordered.

In the blink of an eye, Johann's body vanished as he turned into a shadow that blended into the darkness.

Shadow Transformation Technique!

This was a technique Johann was most well-versed in and it was the best method for discreet scouting. Nightfall was the best camouflage as he rapidly traversed through the crisscrossed shadows of tall buildings and arrived very quickly at the bookstore on 23rd Avenue, unit 412.

Johann slowed down and did a meticulous sweep of the bookstore's surroundings. He was being cautious but at the same time, slightly skeptical.

...There's no aetheric disturbance in this place at all. Based on pure perception, this is just but a simple and ordinary bookstore. However, a mission the superiors view with great importance surely wouldn't be easy.

Johann then entered and surveyed the bookstore's first floor but wasn't able to discover anything abnormal. All he found was neatly arranged rows of bookshelves and books and thus, he proceeded to the second floor.

The layout upstairs was simpler, just like an ordinary residence. Johann quickly checked all the places he ought to and eventually the last place left to investigate was the bookstore owner's bedroom.

The only indication of life came from that room, though the aura was seemingly ordinary as if the one inside wasn't an extraordinary being. That meant the bookstore owner was sleeping soundly within the room.

As Johann inched towards the bedroom door, he thought to himself. *Perhaps, I can just get rid of this fellow at the same time and report back that the person everyone was so worried about was merely an ordinary person and had already been easily disposed of.*

He couldn't help snickering as he reverted to his original form and reached out to twist the doorknob.

Johann peeked through the crack as it gradually widened and his mind instantly went blank.

Inside, the entire room was covered with pulsating veins and squirming flesh that spread out from the headboard, extending to the walls and floor. At the feet of the bed were a cluster of white iris flowers glowing faintly, illuminating the smiling face of the young man on the bed who seemed as if he was having a sweet dream.

Johann hadn't even been able to react when those densely-packed blood veins appeared to be startled and started rushing towards him.

Chapter 30 Run

Chapter 30: Run

The entire duration of Johann witnessing this frightening scene up till the point where he lost consciousness merely lasted for a moment.

The image of pure white flowers growing on flesh and blood remained etched in his mind. Such a contrast caused his skin to tingle and his hairs to stand on end. However, Johann couldn't react in time and try to escape.

In the next second, his vision turned pitch black and a sensation of extreme pain spread throughout his body.

This momentary second that seemed like an eternity made him feel absolute despair.

He could distinctly feel those tendril-like veins climbing up his body and burrowing into his ears, eyes, mouth, and nostrils. The veins infiltrated his skin, internal organs, and finally his brain.

Johann felt like he was a swollen bag of flesh and bones with his insides frantically being meshed up. Finally, when it all settled down, he was no longer himself and neither was he still a person with any sense of concept.

The middle-aged black magician standing at the door suddenly ceased moving and his head drooped down. His hand was still on the doorknob as the squirming bloody veins all over his body vanished rapidly.

Creak——

Johann took a step back and gently closed the door once more.

As he made his way down the stairs, he continued to mumble to himself, "I...I...I have...to...I have to..."

It was as if he had just gained the ability to speak and was muttering a whole bunch of nonsensical words.

But as he slowly reached the ground floor, his speech gradually regained normalcy and the words he uttered had become clearer.

“I have to eliminate... all existences that threaten the lord...

“Oh Lord, from here on out, your servant...pledges his utmost loyalty.”

Uri was waiting in a dark alley. After finishing a cigarette, he tossed the butt onto the ground and stamped it out before taking out his pocket watch.

Some raindrops splashed onto the face of the pocket watch. Uri frowned and used his thumb to wipe it dry.

Half an hour had already passed.

The alley was less than 2 kilometers away from 23rd Avenue and given Johann's speed when using his Shadow Transformation technique, he should have been able to reach his destination within five minutes.

His investigation objectives couldn't be considered thorough either. This was already very much slower compared to Johann's previous scouting assignments.

“Seems like this bookstore isn't that simple after all...” sighed Uri. His decision to be cautious and not head down personally had been right.

However, up till now, he hadn't sensed any large scale changes in the aether coming from the direction of 23rd Avenue. At the very least, a fight hadn't broken out.

The most plausible reason was that Johann's infiltration was successful but he encountered certain defensive measures and wasn't able to obtain any findings. Such a situation wouldn't be

considered too bad, just that the bookstore owner had probably been spooked and Uri would personally have to follow up.

Now, all he could do was wait for Johann to return before thinking of the next step.

Uri had confidence in Johann's concealment and escaping abilities. After all, crossbreeds between humans and dream beasts were extremely rare existences.

With half shadow moss bryozoan blood in his veins, Johann could easily turn into a shadow, blend into darkness, and mask his own presence as easily as breathing.

Pitter-patter... Pitter-patter...

In the blink of an eye, the heavy rain had washed away the extinguished cigarette butt into the sewers.

Uri kept his pocket watch and was about to light another cigarette when he froze up.

His cigarette had already been extinguished, so why was there a shadow in this pitch-black alley on a rainy night?

"Damn it!"

Uri scowled and immediately pinched the unlit cigarette in hand and pointed it upwards. "Flame Enchantment – Combustion Light!"

Boom!

An intense blaze shaped like a streak of lightning erupted forth from the unfortunate cigarette that was used as a tool of sorcery and lit up the entire alley instantly.

Naturally, light and fire were the best ways to deal with shadows!

However, Uri knew that the circumstances now weren't favorable for him. The humidity from the rain substantially diminished the effectiveness of all fire-based magic and his sorcery aid was just an ordinary cigarette.

This meant that this Combustion Light technique could only hold for a few seconds and wouldn't really cause much damage.

Thus, Uri immediately started to fall back, while at the same time drawing out a red gemstone the size of a coin from his inner pockets. He was now rather certain that the assailant was Johann who had become a turncoat.

Although Uri didn't know what had caused this betrayal, one thing was certain now—Johann had to die!

"Flame enchantment – Scorching Earth!" growled Uri with a cold gaze in his eyes.

However, the shadow on the ground was even quicker.

A split second before Uri realized something was wrong, that shadow had already reverted to its original human form and chucking countless sharp metal stakes that pierced through Uri's body.

"Arghhh!" The inertia nailed Uri to the alley wall with a loud bang, and the tremendous pain caused him to cry out.

Just being impaled wouldn't have caused such a reaction. However, countless barbs had been formed on the metal stakes when they pierced through his body, and that was the cause of his miserable groans.

At the same time, a ferocious blaze blasted through the entire alley, turning everything into scorched earth.

Johann's feeble body was torn apart by flames and burned to ashes. Under the piercing glow of blazing flame, his body became a blackened silhouette.

The brief skirmish had come to an end.

Uri utilized transfiguration magic to free the metal stakes from his body and used heat to melt them into molten metal.

Gasping for breath, he tottered forward while pressing on his

wounds and smirked. “Did you think I wouldn’t be on guard? I’m more well-versed in betrayal than you. How naive!”

All signs of life within the blaze had ceased and the blackened silhouette that had turned into a charred body was still standing in the middle of the alley. This represented the demise of a foolish black wizard.

Uri raised a hand, preparing to cast a final spell to conclude this battle.

As bits of floating ash fell to the ground, countless bloodied veins had taken root on the alley walls and had covered the entire alley in an instant.

“What the hell?!”

By the time Uri realized something was amiss, the entire alley had already been sealed by a mass of squirming bloody veins.

He immediately released his spell but this terrifying and rapidly growing mass had already started to gather towards Uri and was about to engulf him.

Uri looked all around him, fear finally showing on his face. “You aren’t Johann! Who are you!”

From the mass of veins, tissue, and sarcoma that was heaving as though it was breathing, came Johann’s shrill voice. “Oh Lord... Your servant... has eliminated a hindrance...”

Lord? Uri clutched at this word. He knew Johann’s background very well and knew Johann had never been a believer of any faith.

How can there suddenly be a ‘Lord’, just half an hour after Johann had gone to investigate?

There can only be one explanation. The bookstore owner! This is the bookstore owner’s warning!

Uri’s final thoughts flashed just before he was engulfed.

Knock knock.

Heris heard a knocking from the door behind him. “Come in. What is it?”

The trembling voice of the subordinate rang out. “Mr. Uri... he’s dead.”

Heris was stunned. “How did that happen?”

“Mr. Uri followed your instructions and dispatched someone to investigate the bookstore on 23rd Avenue. However, the person that had been sent returned with some unknown power, betraying Mr. Uri and killing him.

“Here is a report including photos of the scene and identified traces of magic to reconstruct the scene. There is also a... last message on the ground that Mr. Uri spent his last moments to leave behind.”

“What?”

“He said... ‘Run’.”

Chapter 31 Eight Extra Teeth

Chapter 31: Eight Extra Teeth

Heris reached out and received the file from his subordinate.

Right at the top was a scene reconstruction report those black magicians of ‘Scarlet Cult’ had done. The paper document was filled with a long and detailed analysis.

It even included the time of magic release, extent of aetheric disturbance, state of mind, scope of damage on the scene, and many other details. Anything that was of significant importance was neatly collated within.

Fortunately, black magicians weren’t like the bunch of Truth Unions blockheads and had marked out the most important points. Furthermore, there was a complete and detailed description of the scene reconstruction.

Such detailed investigation reports could only be achieved by magicians.

Investigation methods used by hunters tended to rely on themselves as well as their senses. For example, hunters with superior vision could spot blood-stains or disturbances in the aether that ordinary people wouldn’t notice.

However, they could also see another hidden aspect of the world and eventually go insane...

Of course, this was just but a myth. Veteran hunters that truly went crazy and finally died would have already lost their speech abilities long ago and wouldn’t be able to accurately depict what they witnessed to others through their growls and grunts.

The temporary collaboration between ‘White Wolves’ and ‘Scarlet Cult’ was really beneficial for both sides.

In battle, the complement of close and long-range combat increased the efficiency of their fighting strength. As of the current situation, this cooperation was something both sides couldn't do without...

But the premise was that they shared the same objective. Otherwise, those high and mighty magicians would never choose to work together with the hunters.

Heris skimmed through the file and flipped to the last page when his eyes narrowed. The final part of the file was a photograph of the scene.

The entire alley was covered with flesh and blood. Veins and lumps of meat plastered the ground and walls. Even if this was a photograph, those bloody bits seemed as if they were still squirming.

Nothing remained of Uri's corpse and the only way to identify that he had been there was the tattered bits of his clothing that were left behind.

His entire corpse had been twisted into either a fleshy pulp or possibly a nest of some organism. Bloodied veins that covered the body had completely ruined the corpse's appearance and a pure white iris flower was growing from an orifice which seemed to be the mouth. The supposedly green roots of the iris embedded deep into the flesh and were now dark red in color.

It was difficult to determine if the flower had been planted there or if it had grown out from this mass of flesh and blood.

However, according to the report, the flower as well as the mass of flesh and blood had withered away a short while after the photograph was taken.

It was as if this flower was some parasitic organism that absorbed the nutrients from the bodies of Johann and Uri before withering away when the source was depleted.

The strange posture of the corpse in the alley and the long trails of blood behind it depicted the suffering and pain Uri went through

before he died.

Uri had expended all his efforts in his final moments to leave behind a desperate message in blood.

‘Run’.

Heris placed the file on the desk and exhaled sharply. “This means that after Johann returned from the bookstore, his consciousness had already been taken over by something unknown... Am I right to say that those black magicians have no way of analyzing what that thing is?”

His subordinate lowered his head. “Yes.”

“What are their plans to follow up on this?”

“The decayed flesh and iris flower have already been collected and will be handed over to Scarlet Cult headquarters for ‘Precant’ Morpheus to study. At present, they have advised us to give up investigating the bookstore for the time being and focus all our efforts on ensuring the incubation of the Magic Ovum Mirror.”

“That Scarlet Cult Destructive-rank that hasn’t shown himself all this time?” Heris maintained his calm demeanor. “Tell them that White Wolves will fully cooperate.”

“Yes.”

The subordinate bowed respectfully and left the room.

Is this the bookstore owner’s warning? Heris pondered in silence.

He turned around and gazed outside the window. Beyond the window was part of a large factory. A massive incubator was placed in the center and within it was the Magic Ovum Mirror.

Ensure the incubation of the Magic Ovum Mirror?

But Heris didn’t forget that Ji Zhixiu suddenly showed up and was able to be on par with him because she had come into contact with that bookstore owner.

He had reason to believe that the bookstore owner was the person currently supporting Ji Zhixiu. There was no guarantee that the escaped Ji Zhixiu would not gain even more assistance from the bookstore owner.

I cannot allow any more variables...

Lin Jie opened his eyes, waking up from his dream.

He couldn't help smiling as he remembered the pleasant dream he had as he gazed up at the soft feathers fluttering above him. "I've really got to give my thanks to Old Wilde the next time I see him. This thing really brings sweet dreams."

Lin Jie sat up, took some deep breaths and did a little stretching. His body felt relaxed and full of vitality.

The rain outside hadn't ceased and the gloomy weather made it difficult to discern the time. Lin Jie glanced at the metal alarm clock at his bedside.

6 a.m.

This was 30 minutes earlier than when he usually woke up but at the same time, him feeling energetic meant that the quality of his previous night's sleep had been good.

"We can still meet in a dream when the next night arrives. I hope what she says really comes true," muttered Lin Jie to himself as he got off the bed, changed, and headed into the bathroom.

Even though there was a possibility of having this sort of continuous dream, the probability of it happening was really tiny. Lin Jie felt that his previous dream was a fluke and all he could hope for was that the dream-catcher's net would capture another beautiful dream for him.

Standing before the basin, Lin Jie picked up his toothbrush and started his daily grooming. Maintaining a neat and tidy appearance was a courtesy that he couldn't do without.

“Gurgle gurgle... Pui!”

Lin Jie spat out a mouthful of saliva and foam, then rinsed his mouth twice more. He then washed his face with a towel and smiled at the mirror, checking his teeth out of habit.

Suddenly, Lin Jie was stunned. “Why does it seem like... something is off?”

Lin Jie eyed the mirror suspiciously and opened his mouth wider and used a finger to touch his two rows of teeth.

Upon closer inspection, he confirmed that he had grown eight extra teeth at the ends of his jaws. His original teeth especially his molars seemed to have shrunk and the few new inhabitants had fitted in snugly. Lin Jie wouldn't even have noticed if he hadn't taken a closer look.

“Even if I've suddenly gotten hyperdontia, they shouldn't have grown that quickly, eh?”

Lin Jie frowned. After some thought, he suspected that this was the doing of Blackie.

—Blackie was the name he had given to the hidden hand behind his transmigration. After all, it had the appearance of a black silhouette.

However, the more Lin Jie thought about it, a bunch of extra teeth didn't seem to have any significance.

“Haa, never-mind, who knows what goes on through its mind. Perhaps, giving teeth is a form of blessing for it?”

Lin Jie tested his bite a couple of times and realized his teeth function didn't seem to be affected in any way and thus, he gave up mulling over the matter.

All was fine as long as the teeth were usable and didn't hurt.

Lin Jie tidied up his appearance and went downstairs to open his business for the day.

“I wonder if there will be any new customers today.”

Chapter 32 Arm Wrestle

Chapter 32: Arm Wrestle

As per usual, Lin Jie proficiently unlatched the bolt and opened the door to his bookstore.

The rain outside hadn't shown any signs of letting up, and it was as if the heavens above had forgotten to turn the faucet off.

The water level on the flooded roads seemed to have gone down slightly today; according to news reports, it was probably due to the underground sewage system operating at its highest efficiency .

However, the thing that surprised everyone was the several heavy vehicles passing by the usually empty street.

Headlamps shone through the curtain of rain and lit up the street for brief moments. Occasionally, curious faces would peek out from shops and residences on both sides of the street before once again shutting their doors or windows to prevent the rain from entering.

These vehicles came and went quickly and quiet normalcy resumed once more.

"Could there be an accident?" Lin Jie wondered as he watched the waves created from the passing trucks. On further thought, accidents weren't out of the question in this heavy rain.

There also seemed to be heavy machineries used for construction such as bulldozers and excavators on these trucks.

Lin Jie also wanted to listen to the morning news broadcast from next door to find out what had happened. But after staying in his seat for quite some time, he still had yet to hear the crackling static from the television.

"Hmm?"

According to the usual routine, Lin Jie found this a little strange.

When such unusual occurrences happened, the next-door boss would definitely turn up the volume of his television and set it on a channel that gave reports on the matter that everyone was curious about.

However, he hadn't done this today and it seemed as if the television wasn't even switched on.

How strange. Could it be another trip? Or has the next-door boss fallen ill all of a sudden? Lin Jie couldn't help worrying.

Although this neighbor had some shortcomings, he was just a regular citizen and couldn't be judged as a bad person.

Already used to listening to news in this way so many times, Lin Jie found it slightly unsettling now that it was missing. Thus, he inched over to the attached wall and called out, "Excuse me..."

Before he finished speaking, a startled cry came from the other end, "Ahh!"

Slightly puzzled, Lin Jie asked, "Did something happen?"

There was a moment of silence before a shaky voice answered, "Nothing, really. It's nothing... There's no need to be so courteous, there's no need to."

The boss of the audio-visual store next door gulped several times while speaking incoherently and asked, "Is anything the matter?"

"I just wanna ask why your television isn't turned on. Is it having a problem?"

Oh god! He realized something's amiss! In movies, those who reveal their bad intentions all end up dying!

The audio-visual store owner scrambled to turn on the television at once. "I'll turn it on, I'll turn it on! I'm so sorry! I'll turn it on at once!"

The television next-door turned on and displayed a current news broadcast about an accident involving several buildings collapsing.

Ahh, so it's a building collapse. Well, it's quite probable that some poorly-made buildings would collapse in such torrid weather. Oh, there are casualties as well, seems like this accident is quite serious.

"Alright, thank you." Lin Jie nodded his head and gave his thanks but suddenly felt that something seemed off.

Wasn't the neighbor's tone impatient yet somehow polite? That doesn't make sense.

Lin Jie couldn't help thinking about his previous conjecture and thus called out, "Mr. Colin, are you sure you are fine? Your body requires ample rest to live well."

Beads of sweat started to break out on Colin's forehead.

Why is he asking me such a question? Don't tell me that he has gone and done something to my body? Now he is warning me not to act blindly without thinking, otherwise I wouldn't be able to live well...

Colin eyed the television, then turned his gaze to the cellphone he was holding that displayed a message that he had been hesitating to send for a long time. His entire body was frozen stiff.

Lin Jie's voice sounded from next door. "Mr. Colin?"

Colin shuddered and his finger slightly moved. Looking down, he realized that he had clicked to send out the text message.

Message recipient: Church of the Dome, Father Vincent.

Colin turned pale and his soul nearly left his body out of fright. Using all his effort, Colin controlled his chattering mouth from unleashing a string of expletives. He gritted his teeth and cursed viciously to himself, *What's done is done, it's too late for regrets.*

Now, this information had already been passed on to the father. If Colin could continue hiding it for some time, he might perhaps still be able to survive.

Oh Father, please save me!

“Haa... It’s nothing, I’m fine. Thanks for your concern.” Colin forced himself to calm down and pretended to be relaxed.

Hearing this reply, Lin Jie felt that Colin wasn’t being entirely truthful but he wasn’t going to probe further anyway.

“If that’s the case, I shan’t bother you then,” Lin Jie replied as he wondered whether he ought to pay a visit to check on this next-door neighbor.

At this moment, there was a crisp ringing of the bell by the door.

“Welcome,” said Lin Jie while looking up. *Looks like we indeed have a new customer today*, Lin Jie thought to himself.

The person who had entered the bookstore appeared to be a tall red-haired girl seemingly in her late teens. This teenage girl had a beautiful face brimming with youthfulness and bright eyes that were especially conspicuous.

She had on a white T-shirt, denim overalls, and a pair of bright yellow round-toed boots. Her long hair was braided into shoulder-length pigtails that were partially hidden under a peaked cap.

Young customers like this rarely popped up in the bookstore.

“May I help you with anything?” asked the young man behind the counter.

Melissa surveyed the entire bookstore curiously before she shifted her sights to Lin Jie.

With three quick strides, she reached the table and pulled out the stool before sitting on it. “Are you this bookstore’s owner?” Melissa queried while shaking her legs.

Lin Jie nodded and replied with a smile. “Yes, that’s me. Let me know if you require anything. Whether it is borrowing, purchasing, or just reading a book, all of it is fine.”

He doesn’t seem very impressive... Is this bookstore really S-rank? Could Dad have made a mistake?

A bunch of doubtful thoughts went through Melissa's mind. She had carefully examined this bookstore and only noticed that the stone gargoyle seemed like a product of black magicians. Everything else was completely ordinary.

Melissa eyed the young man before her in disappointment and had even forgotten that the reason she came here was because she was curious about the ending of *Seed of the Abyss* that she had yet to finish reading.

Isn't this place too ordinary...

She had braved the rain and run the risk of a good scolding from her father to get here, yet this wasn't the mystical and charming bookstore she had been expecting. Melissa couldn't stop herself as she thought about it.

"Can you really help with anything?" Melissa muttered as she rested her chin on both hands.

Haa... what even goes through the mind of kids nowadays.

A few beads of sweat appeared on Lin Jie's forehead but he smiled politely and answered, "Well, overly absurd requests won't do."

Melissa slammed both hands on the counter-top. "Is having an arm wrestle with you too much to ask?"

Chapter 33 Father-Daughter Conflict

Chapter 33: Father-Daughter Conflict

Lin Jie's lips twitched subtly. If he wasn't careful in keeping his expressions in check, his face now would definitely be scrunched up in confusion.

Quite a number of colorful individuals characters had visited his bookstore during the past in these three years, but this was the first time someone had requested an arm wrestle.

Lin Jie had never heard such a strange request in all his years operating his bookstore or even when he was still lecturing at a university before his transmigration...

Out of the three choices of 'borrowing', 'purchasing', or 'reading', would a normal person have chosen to 'arm wrestle'?

Is this appropriate?

It clearly isn't.

With his instincts as a life mentor, Lin Jie felt that there was something fishy about this. He once again eyed this teenage girl with a scrutinizing gaze.

She had no makeup on, yet her skin condition was very good. She wore clothes that had an exquisite level of craftsmanship and her cap was from a rather well-known brand. Slight bits of mud could be spotted were on her boots, but the shoe prints left on the floor were clear. She had probably washed them by the puddles outside the door.

From these subtle observations, Lin Jie felt that this teenage girl had an air of sophistication.

The most noteworthy aspect was her tightly braided red hair. It was clearly well maintained like soft fur that would probably be pleasing to the touch.

In short, she was probably from a well-to-do family. While recalling the teenage girl's expression when she entered, Lin Jie could see expressions of anxiousness and disappointment.

He was quite certain that this girl had specifically come to visit the bookstore and hadn't entered to take shelter from the rain like Ji Zhixiu had done.

If so, why would a young girl from a rich family that would have no lack of entertainment options suddenly come running over to Lin Jie's bookstore... to have an arm wrestle with him?

At present, Lin Jie didn't feel that his bookstore had any special characteristics that would make one brave the rain just for a casual visit.

No, wait a moment.

Could the reason for the an increased number of new customers be because one of them is promoting my place?

Ji Zhixiu, Joseph... Joseph?

Lin Jie folded his arms and examined this young girl closely with a piercing gaze.

Although it wasn't obvious, there were some resemblances between her and Joseph, especially the eyes. This might sound strange, but... while Joseph looked like an aged tough guy, it was possible to tell that he was a handsome young lad back in his day from the alignment of his facial features.

Therefore, it was correct to say that this young girl before him had an uncanny resemblance to the young Joseph.

At this point, Lin Jie's intuition told him that this teenage girl before him was probably Joseph's kin. Unknowingly, Lin Jie didn't realize realized that he had been staring at this young girl for close

to a minute.

This silent and intense scrutiny brought about a formless pressure for Melissa. After being observed watched in silence, the originally overbearing Melissa slowly withdrew her hands from the counter-top and placed them stiffly on her knees as if she had a guilty conscience. "What...What's wrong? Arm wrestling shouldn't be too much to ask for, right? Or is it not okay?"

This fellow still seems very ordinary but why do I suddenly feel like I have done something wrong? Why is this... the same feeling I get when Dad reprimands me for doing something wrong?

The teenage girl couldn't help feeling flustered at such thoughts.

Lin Jie returned to his senses and realized he was being impolite. Clearing his throat, he said, "Arm wrestling is fine, but I have two questions to ask before that. Is that okay?"

Melissa nodded. "What questions?"

Lin Jie put up a finger. "First question. You came because of Joseph, am I right?"

Even though this was a query, Lin Jie had said it with such conviction.

Melissa's heart skipped a beat. She never expected the bookstore owner to mention Joseph's name straight off the bat.

Her eyes widened in shock as she stared at the young man opposite her.

At the same time, her foreboding sentiments deep down grew more and more intense.

"Looks like I'm right."

Since these two were indeed related, then the probability of them having familial ties was extremely high.

Lin Jie waved a finger and smiled. "Don't look at me that way. The

two of you just look alike.”

Melissa rolled her eyes, cheeks puffing up like a blow-fish as she huffed, “Who the heck looks like him!”

With his increasingly precise insight, Lin Jie guessed that this teenage girl and Joseph were probably father and daughter given her rebellious attitude and look of disdain.

Alas, he really saw this type of circumstances all too often.

Previously, it was had been a lady left heartbroken by a scumbag, and this time it was a teenage girl having run away from home because of a disagreement with a parent.

Indeed, there was an increasing need for Lin Jie’s ample skills as a life mentor.

At this moment, Melissa was already regretting. She no longer felt that her father had made a mistake but rather, she had landed herself in slightly unsavory circumstances due to her own judgment and curiosity.

Of course, this wasn’t a dangerous situation. However, since this person had instantly realized her relationship with Joseph, there was a very high possibility that he would tattle on her.

Indeed, it was unwise to come barging into an S-rank zone, even if it was supposedly ‘friendly’.

The only fortunate bit was that the ‘friendly’ part evaluation on the file was true after all.

Lin Jie extended the second finger. “As for the second question, why do you want to arm wrestle with me?”

Had it been any other regular customer making this request, Lin Jie wouldn’t be making such an inquiry. However, the one before him was a new, young customer of the fairer sex and her request involved physical contact.

For the sake of his own reputation and innocence, Lin Jie had no

choice but to be a little more prudent.

Females weren't the only ones that got harassed. Men had to remember to protect themselves when being outside as well!

Furthermore, thoroughly understanding the strange intentions of the other party would aid in his psychological evaluation and doling out of chicken soup.

Melissa sat upright and gazed straight ahead. "Joseph says that when feeling upset over something or someone but being unable to take action due to certain reasons, it's best to find someone to arm wrestle."

Huh? Lin Jie was baffled and asked doubtfully, "Why arm wrestling?"

Wait a moment, does this mean that the reason she's upset is because of a disagreement with Joseph? And she's... using me to vent her anger?

Oh god, what a brat!

With a straight face, Melissa answered, "It's best to find the person involved. In this way, I will be able to enjoy the opponent's discomfited look of having no other alternative.

"Also, the opponent would come across cowardly if he rejects this game-like activity and it can be forcefully started if he rejects it. Furthermore, if the opponent gets angry and acts out, it gives me a reason to beat him up."

Huhhhh????

Lin Jie's entire mind was filled with question marks. He started to really doubt Joseph's qualifications as a father in bringing up his children.

Haaa, I can't really expect much from a military veteran suffering from PTSD to raise a child properly, can I?

"Alright, how do you want to compete?" Lin Jie felt like he was on the verge of having a headache.

But Melissa was just venting her frustrations, and Lin Jie was willing to accede to her request. She was such a young girl with scrawny limbs after all, so she would probably not be able to muster up much strength. But even so, Lin Jie would have to put that bratty kid in her place.

“Best of three,” suggested Melissa cautiously while thinking to herself that while this bookstore owner didn’t seem that ordinary, he looked like he was probably a scholar or a magician.

This S-rank person could would probably be more proficient in aetheric aspects, but his physical body definitely wouldn’t be that strong.

The two of them made themselves sit stably on both sides of the counter and locked hands as the atmosphere became nervous and frayed.

The man seemed to be in a rather relaxed state, but Melissa sensed that he merely had the strength of an average adult male.

Taking a deep breath, she muttered, “Three.”

“Two.

“One.

“Start!”

Baam!

The match had been decided.

Melissa stared blankly at her arm pinned against the counter-top.

How is this possible?!

Chapter 34 Heart Goes Out To All Parents

Chapter 34: Heart Goes Out to All Parents

Melissa's mind went blank as she stared at her arm that was pinned onto the table.

H-how can this be!

She looked up and noticed the bookstore owner had an expression that seemed to say that everything was within his expectations.

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow and smiled smugly at Melissa before releasing her hand, as if to say "I'm still quite good at arm wrestling".

But... Melissa had clearly sensed that his muscles and strength had been at the level of an ordinary man! At the age of six, Melissa could already take on ten fully grown men and pound them all to the ground. Now sixteen years old, there was no reason for her to be unable to win an arm wrestling match!

Although she was just an Abnormal-rank, her ability was already at Pandemonium-rank, just that the Truth Union hadn't yet published this year's ranking lists.

But now, she had even lost in an arm wrestling match...

Melissa started to drown in self-doubt.

Could he have used the aether to cheat?

The bookstore owner opposite noticed Melissa's eyes and as if capable of reading her mind, he smiled and said, "I didn't cheat. At such close distance, I would be immediately found out if I did so."

That had indeed been the truth. This was such a narrow space and the two of them were so close together with their hands touching.

Any changes in the aether, no matter how minute would have definitely been sensed.

Therefore, this bookstore owner was the genuine article.

But as Melissa came to this realization, she got even more upset and disbelieving.

Lin Jie felt a little bad seeing the dejected young girl with her head lowered and thus consoled her, “Young lady, your strength at such an age is already very impressive. Actually, I found it rather tough. See, weren’t we in a deadlock at the start?”

What he said was the truth and Lin Jie looked slightly apologetic.

Yeah right, a deadlock for merely a moment. It makes me want to puke. Melissa clenched her fists tightly. Even if she was just an apprentice knight, Melissa had her own dignity and pride.

In the beginning, she had indeed come with an intent to provoke. However, she was aware that her arrogance had caused her to mistake things but still... she wasn’t willing to accept this.

“Best of three, again!” insisted the young girl with a firm and unwavering gaze.

Lin Jie was moved by her imposing attitude. Even though she was still a brat, this fighting spirit was laudable.

Lin Jie did feel like he was bullying a kid but he had been really surprised during the initial moments of their arm wrestling match. The rugged strength that this feeble little girl displayed was something he hadn’t expected.

“Alright, let’s have another round then,” said Lin Jie with an earnest nod of the head.

The two of them extended their arms and grabbed the other. Lin Jie appeared calm while Melissa had a look of fixation for the first time.

“Three, two, one, start!”

The two hands trembled...

Melissa gritted her teeth as she exerted all her strength, grimacing as she stared fixedly at her own hand. Her fair slender arm had become lumps of tight muscle as bulging veins appeared on her forehead.

Lin Jie's lips twitched as he watched this scene.

Like father, like daughter...

But even so, the intrinsic quality of a female body is still a restriction.

Lin Jie couldn't help chuckle as he accidentally increased his strength, resulting in the equilibrium being broken immediately.

Baam!

The second match was over.

Melissa remained dazed in her seat, her hands still on the table. Her face was pale and she wanted to cry but no tears came out.

"I should have known..."

Lin Jie smiled and said, "Alright, isn't it just arm wrestling? Is winning and losing that important?"

Lin Jie reckoned that having this child remember such a lesson would do her some good. Otherwise, what were to happen if she offended some unsavory individuals in the future with her personality and physique?

"If we were using knives, you would have already been dead. Fights aren't done this way," Lin Jie lectured as he tapped Melissa's forehead with an outstretched finger.

A brute like Joseph won't do, I guess the kindhearted me has to step out and help provide a guiding light for his child.

Given these tendencies, she might end up being some female gangster boss in school.

That would be really terrible. I've got to nip it in the bud and get rid of her habit of randomly challenging others to an arm wrestle! Thought Lin Jie to himself.

Melissa puffed her cheeks and stared at Lin Jie as if she was miserable from being bullied by him.

Lin Jie withdrew his finger and casually continued the conversation, "Alright, I have already fulfilled your request. Now, perhaps you can tell me why you have come to my bookstore?"

Melissa answered obediently, "I wanted to borrow a book."

"Haa, you should have told me that from the start. What book do you want to borrow?" replied Lin Jie.

Melissa calmed herself down and mumbled softly, "I read part of the book that my dad borrowed in secret. However, I was nearly caught before even reaching the end... Do you have another copy here?"

She reckoned the bookstore owner was getting back at her for her initial impolite attitude when she first entered the store.

What a petty big shot. Melissa no longer had the misconception that this bookstore owner was ordinary. The being in front of her was a monster that was beyond the scope of logical reason.

Furthermore, Joseph had oftentimes said that a wise man submits to circumstances. An outstanding knight needed to know when to be flexible and apply appropriate compromise.

Lin Jie felt he understood the situation. It seemed like a father-daughter conflict had broken out.

This wasn't anything out of the ordinary. Many disagreements between parent and child often started over the tiniest of matters. Then, stifling parental pressure coupled with the child's rebellious tendencies would eventually lead to a full-blown war.

Lin Jie smiled, "Of course, there are even other editions. But... why didn't you try speaking with Joseph?"

Melissa rested her chin between her hands and sighed, “If he’s aware that I know he reads this sort of book, he would surely kick up a fuss. How can I even get him to lend it to me?”

“From embarrassment?” Lin Jie asked earnestly. “On the contrary, I do not think that is so. As long as you show that you understand, I believe that he would understand where you are coming from. Actually, there is no such thing as an insurmountable gulf between parent and child. All that lacks is a little trust towards each other.”

Melissa was startled by Lin Jie’s explanation but very quickly turned her head over. “He has never ever understood me and is always busy with his work. Whenever I get my practice results from school, he would just berate me for not being good enough and goes on and on about how he was like in the past.”

Ah... so that's the case, the same old common root problem — Unsatisfactory results.

Joseph is always busy with work, and only has the time to only check his daughter's school work each day. But as a result of neglecting his child, her results start to fall.

As a retired veteran incapable of expressing himself appropriately, he could only spur his child along through scoldings and thinking himself as an example. However, he's the total opposite in the eyes of his daughter.

Lin Jie suddenly had an epiphany.

Haa... My heart really goes out to all parents.

“Since you put it in this way, how about first achieving a standard that makes him sit up and take notice?” Lin Jie chuckled lightly as he turned around and pulled out a “ **Five-Three** ” book from the shelf behind.

Full title — ***Five Years of Gaokao, Three Years of Practice***

[TL Note:

Gaokao is the name of the college entrance exams in China

Five-Threes are a compilation of gaokao exam questions of the past five years and outstanding mock exam questions within the recent three years to serve as revision material, hence the name

How it actually looks like: [://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/51BLwbsiNYL.jpg](https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/51BLwbsiNYL.jpg)

Chapter 35 Knowledge Is Power

Chapter 35: Knowledge Is Power

Five Years of Gaokao, Three Years of Practice

The stuff of nightmares for countless students as well as a super effective weapon used to suppress brattish kids.

As the saying goes, a child is only misbehaving because he doesn't have enough homework. Therefore, a **Five-Three** could be used to treat various aspects.

Lin Jie pulled out a mathematics **Five-Three** from the shelf. Evidently, just one **Five-Three** mathematics subject wasn't enough to provide this brat a more abundant extracurricular life.

Even though mathematics was a mysterious and profound subject, merely doing mathematics questions wouldn't do.

Therefore, following that, Lin Jie pulled out additional Five-Threes of physics, chemistry, and biology that formed at least half the full set.

The reason it was only half a set wasn't because Lin Jie had a conscience, but rather, he had considered the cultural differences between Azir and Earth.

In the three years since transmigrating over, Lin Jie had conducted a rather extensive research on Azir society so that he could better adapt to life in this place. This research was mainly done through books from this world, conversations with customers as well as news broadcasts from next door.

Till now, all the information he had recorded down was still on the desk in his bedroom.

The levels of science and technology in this world were similar to Earth in the 70s and 80s. There weren't much differences in basic education either as the system and curriculum were still rather alike.

Both had kindergartens, elementary, middle, high schools, and universities. Basic languages, sciences, humanities, and mathematics were the subjects taken here and examination results were used to determine the progression to the next grade and select schools.

The main difference was probably the additional special theology classes they had here. It might be a different world, but the nightmare was all the same.

Now, the reason Lin Jie had selected purely sciences was because of the differences in culture. Languages were still fine but subjects like history and sociology would be the same as asking for trouble.

Without a cultural context to fit with, humanities would be difficult for someone from Azir to understand, let alone solve questions on that subject.

Someone like Old Wil, who specialized in linguistic research and was an academic with a high level of mastery, could take these books as profound research material for a culture he had never touched on before.

But even Old Wil would have a very limited and one-sided understanding of these books. Thus, having a high school student understand all this might be a tad demanding.

However, it was a different story for basic science subjects at high school level. Even though the science and technology in this world slightly deviated from Earth's, this divergence only occurs at later and deeper levels of research.

The basics for sciences were practically similar, just that there wasn't a complete education system nor were there various reference materials.

Actually, Lin Jie had always wanted to recommend rote learning to the teachers of this world but actually doing so would be rather complicated. This was conflicting with his pursuit of an idle and easy life so he thus decided against it.

However today, he was finally getting a chance to try out something. Having Teacher Lin teach one-to-one for free was a rather rare opportunity.

Lin Jie arranged the few books of *Five-Three* and placed them on the counter-top with a loud thud.

Melissa couldn't help be stunned when she saw those books. "What are these?" She suddenly recalled the bookstore owner's words. Hadn't he said to "make him sit up and take notice"?

Let Joseph sit up and take notice? How can that be done...

The former Great Radiant Knight always had high expectations and demands from her. Since young, she had never stopped training in combat skills, yet she never got much praise and was only spurred on through criticism.

She had been hurt numerous times and shed more blood, sweat, and tears than others but no matter how hard she worked, this was what she ought to receive...

Because she was Joseph's child and everyone would naturally have great expectations of her. Even Joseph would often draw comparisons between his former self and her.

The only way to let Joseph sit up and take notice was to immediately achieve an actual Pandemonium-rank standard as her father often harped using the same phrase, "I was already a Pandemonium-rank when I was your age."

Lin Jie's heartfelt words broke her train of thoughts. "At the end of the day, your father just wants you to make something of yourself. As long as you meet his expectations and leave him convinced, you will be able to speak with him confidently."

He continued with a smile, "I can roughly guess how Joseph thinks.

At that time, even if he doesn't say it or he grumbles and curses, you can just request anything you want of him and his heart will surely soften."

How does he understand dad so well... Melissa couldn't help nodding. She turned her attention to the books on the counter-top and said, "So, these books can help me become stronger and gain my father's acknowledgment. Am I right?"

Perhaps it's some training skill. No, perhaps it's some special skill for aetheric control? All sorts of conjectures popped up in the young girl's mind.

Lin Jie couldn't help but sigh with lament. *Knowledge is power, and at least this young lady understands this much.*

With a smile, he pushed the half-set of ***Five-Threes***

across. "You want power? As long as you are able to gain enlightenment and endure this pain, these books will be the keys to open all those doors."

Melissa stretched her hand out, inexorably feeling that something was going to happen. This made her slightly hesitant, but thinking about all the expectations others had for her made Melissa feel suffocated.

In the end, she took all the books. She lowered her head and saw the title on the first book.

Door Key: Origins

As if she was seduced by the devil, Melissa's breathing got heavier as she extended a trembling finger and flipped to the first page.

Everything she saw before her eyes was as though she had opened a forbidden door.

Scrambled characters meshed in an indescribable way. Frightening symbols and erratic images unfolded, progressively wrecking rationality and warping the sense of reality.

Endless & Exhaustible.

Domain & Collective.

Sequence & Truth.

All Things & The Universe.

With cognition gradually being peeled away by the influx of taboo knowledge, all she saw before her eyes was everything collapsing and returning to its initial stage—The world in front of her deconstructing, then reconstructing.

Melissa wanted to shriek, not from physical pain but rather a thorough subversion of her soul. Trembling, she muttered, “No, don’t...”

She felt like a clay figurine that could easily be smashed into million grains of sand.

“Don’t be afraid. It’s the price you must pay to open this door. The future will definitely be grateful to the present you.” The bookstore owner’s voice sounded close yet distant.

Melissa glanced over in his direction and everything within her vision appeared to be strangely shattering.

She opened her eyes wide. Behind the bookstore owner was a huge, majestic book repository that was like a shrine, seemingly holding the cumulative knowledge of an entire world.

Above it was the flickering of billions of stars, residing in the farthest reaches of the universe. The dark, gloomy nebulae gave off the feeling as if it was hiding something.

However, in the next second a hair-raising sensation crept up on Melissa and she immediately withdrew her gaze. After a dazed moment, her vision returned to normal.

As before, it was the ordinary bookstore and the same, ordinary young man.

Thud!

Melissa abruptly closed the book in her hands. All that could be heard in the quiet bookstore was her panting and the pitter-patter of rain from outside.

Chapter 36 Master Key

Chapter 36: Master Key

“Haa...Haa...”

Melissa gasped for breath, feeling as though she had just experienced dying.

Traces of that frightening sensation still lingered in her mind and whatever she understood before was completely revamped. Her soul felt as though it had been crushed by a violent force before being pieced together anew.

Her deepest intrinsic essence seemed as if it was forcefully dug out and rampantly trampled on before this void was crammed full with that strange and unknown emptiness.

She felt as if she was a different self from before she had flipped open the book. Even though all of this had occurred in the same space, she felt that she was no longer the same Melissa.

Although she couldn't really understand what was going on, Melissa vaguely knew what it was that had replaced her soul's intrinsic essence and filled her body— “The Cornerstone of Everything”.

Or perhaps... it could be described as a master key that could unlock whatever doors there were.

Just that this cornerstone within her body had restrictions and could only be used on ‘knight’ characteristics.

But that also meant that from this point on, as long as she was willing, Melissa could immediately acquire all abilities with regards to knights and just needed training to hone them.

Figuratively speaking, “The Cornerstone of Everything” turned reality into a video game and those abilities became skill trees.

All she needed to do was tap an icon, accumulate experience and

just continuously level up.

Bottlenecks nor impediments with regards to her progress no longer existed. *T-this is a great undertaking that only a god can bring about!*

She finally understood the implied meaning of S...Supreme-rank.

With a pale face and sweating bucket-loads, Melissa deeply regretted her impulsiveness.

Prior to this, Melissa had never left Norzin before and had never faced off against any entity beyond Pandemonium-rank. She could still take Joseph as a reference for a Destructive-rank but she totally had no real concept of what a Supreme-rank was.

Moreover, there were already very few written records of Supreme-ranks and the recounts of their feats that spread around were very vague. Most of it was found in theology textbooks but such stories didn't seem especially true.

Melissa had always felt that Supreme-ranks would surely be very powerful but not to an outrageously ridiculous extent. However, facts had proven that she had been very wrong indeed!

Lin Jie could empathize with every student's fear of mathematics. That spine-chilling agony of going around and around in circles but never being able to solve the questions was something that could never be forgotten even when one slept.

However, the reaction of this young girl before him seemed somewhat excessive. Her body was trembling as she panted and her face had even gone pale.

Seems a rather severe case of psychological trauma. Mm... turns out her weak subject is mathematics. Lin Jie took a mental note before he asked, "Are you okay? Do you need my help to answer some questions? It looks like you can't really understand this book very well."

The young girl raised her head in a startled manner and stared at him in alarm. Her eyes were completely full of fear, as if she had just seen a devil.

Devil... Yes, a devil.

Replacing a person's intrinsic essence without making a sound and causing such pain for dissociation and cognition. How can such an existence not be called a devil?

And behind him...

Melissa shivered when she thought of this place. She had to stop thinking about it or she would really go crazy if she continued to think.

But this devil had truly made her wishes come true. So much so it even exceeded her expectations and laid out a broad and open path for her.

Melissa could vaguely sense that this was a path of no return.

These books seemed like they were propagating the cause of a certain mighty entity and the bookstore owner was a guide and preacher.

However, it seemed like she had no other choice...

Lin Jie was extremely surprised by this young girl's expression.

Why is she staring at me as though I have done something terrible? Lin Jie mused. He had merely wanted to enrich the extracurricular life of this new customer and help resolve her family conflict at the same time.

Even though he had anticipated eye rolling upon giving this child the **Five-Three**, Lin Jie was genuinely trying to help.

Many people wouldn't know the importance of learning till it was too late for regrets.

Haa, I've to have a good chat with Joseph regarding this child's education problem the next time he comes around.

*If **Five-Threes** aren't enough, it can be made up with quantity.*

After she is done and her results still aren't good enough, she would probably require more effort so an additional set of past exam questions wouldn't be too much!

And if her results are decent, she has to continue striving on and maintain doing questions. An additional set of past exam questions wouldn't be considered too much as well!

In any case, I just have to continue giving her practice questions.

Lin Jie had already used exam papers to plan out this child's future life and had even decided on her work and rest schedules.

Smiling slightly, he asked, "What's wrong? Are you too afraid of being unable to handle them and don't wish to have these books? I can understand if you choose to give up.

"But, I still feel that you are a very talented child deserving of a better future. As long as you work hard, you can definitely obtain this power to change everything at present, including making your father proud," Lin Jie said with a hint of both regret and sincerity.

Brats needed praise as well. It could even be said that they longed to be praised even more so than normal kids. Moreover, from what Lin Jie had learned, it seemed like Joseph never ever praised her. Such circumstances would generally lead to a loss of self-confidence in a kid.

Melissa's actions such as running away from home and arm wrestling could also be a way for her to seek the attention she lacked.

Such characteristics meant that she was also very easily agitated...

Drumming up her courage, Melissa took a deep breath and squeaked, "No, I'm no coward. Thank you for your understanding and guidance. I will not let you down. I'm...I'm terribly sorry for my previous rudeness!"

She lowered her head and felt ashamed of her own ignorance and insolence.

Watching the wilted Melissa, Lin Jie felt that *Five-Threes* were the bane of all brats. Melissa had become an obedient and well-behaved girl even though she had been an energetic brat mere moments ago.

However, overcoming her fear of studies and choosing to face it head-on was really remarkable.

“It’s alright, this mentality isn’t bad at all. As long as you maintain your inquisitiveness and be modest, the great doors of knowledge will always remain open for you.”

Lin Jie took out a bag and fitted the books in. “Thank you for your patronage. That will be one hundred dollars.”

Melissa paid for the books in a daze and trudged out of the bookstore before she suddenly recalled something.

Haven’t I come to borrow a book?

Why did I end up buying books instead?

Ji Zhixiu regained consciousness from a murky state of darkness. Opening her eyes slightly, she became aware of a light source and instinctively wanted to assume a combat stance.

However, in the next moment, she immediately sensed accurate pain throughout her entire body, causing her to groan.

Her body felt like it was falling apart and there was still a dull throbbing in her head, probably due to sordid blood within her body still exceeding the levels she could normally endure.

Her last memory had been choosing to leap once more. Following that, she lost consciousness.

“Don’t move, you are badly hurt.”

Ji Zhixiu’s vision became a little clearer and she noticed a beautiful and pale face covering her field of vision. This person had shimmering gold hair, clear jade eyes, and two long and pointed

ears that caught Ji Zhixiu's attention.

An elf?

Chapter 37 Anointed

Chapter 37: Anointed

Doris Iris was a pure-blooded and noble elf. Her exquisite pale skin, silky golden hair, and limpid green eyes were more than enough to describe her beauty and lineage.

In this godforsaken land of Azir, everything from ancient times, be it legends, blood treasures, or any other traces were considered extremely precious.

Born at approximately the same time as the ancient giants, the Iris Clan could be considered to be the most unorthodox and ancient of elf clans that lived in seclusion within forests.

But due to their high regard towards their own blood, refusal to intermarry with other clans, the skewed ratio of females to males, and strict adherence to monogamy, the members of the Iris Clan now only numbered slightly more than a hundred.

To put it in another way, they became “endangered”.

This strong sense of crisis impelled them to once again seek for their lost convictions and covenants, leaving the forests and head for Walpurgis Night.

[TL Note: Walpurgis Night is an actual festival celebrated in parts of Europe and was to ward off witchcraft in ancient times]

Walpurgis Night was also known as “Wisdom Revelry” and “Witches’ Feast”. According to ancient legends, the glorious elf kingdom was turned into a scorched wasteland after the elven prince Candela went insane.

With no one to rely on, a small portion of elves signed a covenant with the powerful witch Walpurgis on that completely dark night and gained a new protector.

In the many millennia that followed, elves wanting to seek the help of witches would gather on the last night of the fourth month, lighting up bonfires on nearby hills and convening for a feast and revelry that lasted till the daybreak.

Thus, from the words of hunters and magicians, elves and other spiritual beings that received protection as well as the witches themselves were termed as the “anointed”.

Unfortunately, the witch that bestowed the Iris Clan name had already entered a deep slumber within the dream realm.

Those wanting protection would have to seek out that great existence’s place of slumber. This time, Doris was the anointed being dispatched by the clan to seek out their protector.

According to a sage’s prophecy, clues would appear in a large human capital city built over the ruins of the ancient royal capital—Norzin City.

For elves, this completely unfamiliar city smelled of industrial metal had horrendous weather that never seemed to cease. Furthermore, the recent incidents had caused extensive and chaotic aether fluctuations there.

Elves being naturally sensitive to the aether would find such fluctuations extremely excruciating.

Everything about this place made Doris feel very puzzled and at a loss. However, the unforeseen happened. As she was returning back from getting groceries, she encountered an unknown person covered in blood lying on the ground.

As a newcomer that just rented an apartment here and still finding her feet, Doris’ first reaction when encountering such a situation was naturally to consider her own safety first.

With great difficulty, Ji Zhixiu managed to croak, “So you brought me back?”

“Umm...yeah,” Doris grinned. “At that time, you were just a few steps away from my place. If I left you there, you would be found

by those pursuing you in no time.

“And if they get close to here, they might discover me as well. Such unnecessary troubles are best avoided. Don’t worry, elves are hunters by nature. I’m still rather well-versed in stuff like concealing tracks and whatsoever. No need to thank me.”

Ji Zhixiu retracted the “thank you” that was at the tip of her tongue. She recalled the course of events in the previous battle and endured the pain as she forced herself to sit up. She took a deep breath, then asked, “How long was I out for?”

She didn’t know what the current situation was, or if Kaiyi and Marcus were fine... Would her followers collapse without a leader and be taken down one after the other?

Generally, the Magic Ovum Mirror would take about a month to hatch. Currently, there was probably less than a month left before it hatched and they had yet to find where Heris had hidden it.

The situation wasn’t at all optimistic. There would be disastrous consequences if any entity within the dream realm was allowed to hatch from the Magic Ovum Mirror.

Doris helped Ji Zhixiu up and leaned her against the headboard. She pondered before answering, “It’s been roughly 5 hours. According to the fresh wounds and blood flowing out from your body, I assumed that it hasn’t been 6 hours since you were sent here.”

Six hours. This meant that Ji Zhixiu’s luck wasn’t too bad.

Even though the Sky Wolf had the ability to jump through time and space, Ji Zhixiu had already lost control midway through that jump.

She couldn’t control where she jumped or how long she would linger within the void.

But from the look of things, it seemed like she had been fortunate. Or perhaps... it had been because of the bookstore owner’s blessings.

In any case, the circumstances weren't too bad yet and there was still a chance to turn the tables.

Ji Zhixiu's breath became easier and she surreptitiously started to survey the room she was in. "My name is Ji Zhixiu. You must be an elf... why are you in Norzin? Elves rarely come by because the environment isn't good."

The small and simple room she was in was approximately about the size of 10 square meters. This was the usual sort of temporary rental apartments in Norzin for out-of-townees.

However, it was tidied up neatly and a rich aroma of bone soup lingered in the air. The elf before her was even wearing an apron, so clearly, it had been made by her.

Ji Zhixiu could smell the delectable freshness and any hostility she had faded slightly. However, her most basic vigilance still remained.

She moved her body and felt that she was able to control it much better now.

Her wounds had been given some meticulous treatment by the elf and her body was neatly wrapped with clean bandages and was even topped off with a bow-knot.

Most of Ji Zhixiu's injuries were already healed up and just some residual pain remained, probably due to the damage done from being in beast mutation mode for such an extended period of time. The bubbling blood within her body had already returned to its calm state as well.

"Your regeneration capabilities are tremendous. It looks like you are a rather outstanding hunter, heh," said the beaming elf as she sat down. Gentle aetheric fluctuations floated around her, like a calm surface of water, letting those around her feel comfortable.

She said, "I came here to seek out our Iris Clan's lost glory."

Iris Clan? Ji Zhixiu's eyes narrowed. *That elf clan that was purportedly the most ancient and hallowed of all elf clans?*

Didn't it decline a long time ago? It's said that no Iris Clan members have been seen in several centuries.

Reappear now to seek out their lost glory...

Ji Zhixiu made a guess. "Are you trying to find the witch that once signed the covenant with you?"

"Yes," Doris nodded solemnly. "She is one of the four Primordial Witches, an enigma from the most ancient of times. No one has ever seen her true face and legends say she slumbers in a dream realm covered by snow and frost with only white iris flowers and a tree that reaches into the skies, birthed from the corpse of an ancient dragon.

"Silver is her name."

Chapter 38 His Omniscience Is Divine

Chapter 38: His Omniscience is Divine

“Silver...”

Ji Zhixiu unknowingly found herself repeating the name.

As an experienced hunter and one who mixed around in the world of extraordinary beings for quite some time already, Ji Zhixiu had naturally heard of this legend.

In ancient times, long before giants, elves, and ancient dragons came into being, four unbelievably powerful witches existed in the world that was still mostly a formless mass.

These were the Four Primordial Witches.

Silver, the witch that controlled snow.

Life, the witch that controlled fire.

Walpurgis, the witch that controlled night.

Fraxinus, the witch that controlled the trees.

They split the boundary of the dream realm and reality and raised the high wall of fog that shrouded the entire Azir, protecting people within the wall of fog from the invasions of dream beasts.

They were too overwhelmingly powerful, so much so that people feared their power.

When those that relied on the Primordial Witches were fortunate enough to have their eyes opened became fearful after witnessing a side of these witches, they started to leave from under the Primordial Witch’s wings in succession.

When the elf kingdom disappeared, the gradually estranged Primordial Witches entered dream realms in succession to slumber and there was a deviation in people's beliefs.

For example, over time, the Church of Pestilence that believed in the Wall of Fog removed the Primordial Witches from their faith.

Now, their doctrine preached that the Wall of Fog was a truly ancient and divine existence whose formation had nothing to do with the witches.

Even the Anointed of Walpurgis Night had already diverged from the original intentions and was now an organization that protected against evildoers, just like the Truth Union's scholars and knights of Secret Rite Tower.

Thus, Ji Zhixiu was very surprised that this elf had actually come over to search for a Primordial Witch. Frowning, she asked, "Why here? Norzin is a city that has been fully developed. The Truth Unions aetheric surveillance network covers the entire city comprehensively and it's impossible for the city to hold a Primordial Witch's dream realm."

Currently, the largest fissure of a dream realm was probably the realm of the dream beast about to be hatched by the Magic Ovum Mirror.

But that couldn't be a witch's dream realm. A Primordial Witch could leave their dream realms with just a mere thought and something like a Magic Ovum Mirror was utterly unnecessary.

"Ahh..." Doris had on a vexed expression. "I don't know either. That's just how the sage's prophecy went. She received guidance and that the great Lady Silver who controls snow and ice will descend from her dream realm in this iron city of Norzin and appear to the one blessed by the stars."

She then extended a finger and did a tapping motion on her temples. "You should know that all these prophecies are always vague and might even be full of rubbish."

Ji Zhixiu couldn't help nodding in agreement. "Indeed."

She lifted up the blanket aside, seating herself on the side of the bed as she moved the muscles in her body. "So, how long do you plan on staying here? A place like Norzin where good and bad are mixed together isn't safe for elves."

"Moreover, you should have probably sensed the abnormal circumstances at present," muttered Ji Zhixiu as she pointed to the outside.

Doris stood up, still smiling. "Are you talking about this heavy rain? It doesn't matter. I have got a very high tolerance towards nasty environments. It's totally fine."

"No, not that..." said Ji Zhixiu with a complicated look on her face. She didn't know the best way to explain it.

The Magic Ovum Mirror was peculiar in that it had a strong power to entice one's heart as well as the ability to produce a powerful dream beast under special conditions.

It was an extremely dangerous artifact that would attract unwanted attention and maintaining secrecy before it happened was important, lest the situation got out of hand.

Due to the abnormal weather, Norzin's external passages had already been closed off several days back and vehicles and people from outside were prohibited from entering.

This elf before Ji Zhixiu had surely entered before the rain started and it was understandable for her to know nothing about the situation. However, an elf that came seeking former convictions couldn't be easily persuaded to leave.

Ji Zhixiu could only try to advise as solemnly as she could, "In any case, it's best not to head outside these days. The current situation is very dangerous."

"Yes, yes, yes..." Doris nodded before chortling, "You seem to be in much more dangerous circumstances than me. How is it that you are advising me instead?"

Ji Zhixiu fiddled with her red earring for a moment before a staunch look appeared in her steel gray eyes. "It's because I am a hunter that gazes into the abyss and becomes a monster. At every night where bonfires are lit, I hunt beasts to protect the good and the honest. That is my duty.

"The strength of hunters has never been to gain power for ourselves."

We hover between life and death the more we fight. She was now starting to understand everything that the bookstore owner had accorded her.

Controlling the power of that frenzied beast blood was to teach her humility.

Steel resolve was to bestow her with an indomitable conviction.

She no longer felt bewildered. Following Mr. Lin's footsteps would be her final wish.

Doris was slightly startled but she followed up with a gentle smile. "I see those predecessors of yours in you. This is indeed the true meaning of being a hunter, from ancient times till now."

Ji Zhixiu sensed these words and tone seemed slightly wrong and her expression changed a tad.

Doris suddenly sniffed the air and scrunched up her brows. "Oh no, my soup!"

Ji Zhixiu watched the elf busying herself with the pot and ladle like a flustered newlywed wife. Then again, she felt like she had misperceived something.

Perhaps I'm just too exhausted, thought Ji Zhixiu to herself.

Large chunks of cooked meat and fragrant spices mixed together with the slightly peppery bone soup aroma in the air formed a mouthwatering combination.

A large bowl of piping hot soup was placed on the table by Doris as

she took off her apron and smiled, “Try it out! Fresh dog meat soup specially made for the patient.”

Beneath her apron was a long elvish-styled white dress that made her look both hallowed and graceful. Her vast bosom was like a symbol of elvish kindness. All she needed was a flower garland to turn this crude rented apartment into a mesmerizing forest.

But...dog meat?

Even though elves weren’t vegetarian and they were known to have extraordinary hunting skills, dog meat still seemed a little overboard.

Ji Zhixiu made her way over to the table with slight skepticism and sat down. She tried a spoonful of soup and her eyes lit up. “It’s delicious!”

Doris grinned widely. “I have a great deal of confidence in my cooking ability. Moreover, these are fresh ingredients that were delivered here not too long ago.

“But back to the topic... Given that you are a hunter of Norzin, you should know this place very well. Since it isn’t convenient to head out during this period, I hope that you can provide me some clues as a form of repayment.”

Ji Zhixiu had already finished the bowl of soup and nodded. “That would be best... But, truth be told, I’m currently under extremely dangerous circumstances and might have no way of providing you much help.”

She then paused for a bit before continuing, “However, when the rain stops, you can head over to the bookstore on 23rd Avenue and inquire with the owner. Perhaps, you will be able to get the answer you need.”

Doris blinked several times. “And who is...”

“He’s the one I pledge my loyalty to. A great being that’s come to spread the gospel in our world. Although I have yet to fully understand his ideals, his omniscience is divine.”

Chapter 39 Fresh Dog Meat Soup

Chapter 39: Fresh Dog Meat Soup

“His omniscience is divine.”

A slight hint of doubt appeared in Doris’ eyes but she hid it away quickly.

Without batting an eyelid, she smiled while gently stirring the soup in her own bowl. “Sounds like a great being indeed. However...

“To better integrate with human life, I recently researched the previous year’s Truth Union register for extraordinary beings and there didn’t seem to be such an entity... I guess.

“Since it’s within Norzin, shouldn’t the Truth Union at least have some form of record?”

Ji Zhixiu wasn’t surprised by Doris’ doubts.

After all, having a newly-made acquaintance believe that an all-knowing entity existed in this city was rather improbable.

The words she had just said... sounded very much like—

“Excuse me, do you have a moment to talk about our lord and savior, Mr. Lin?”

It sounded like a textbook missionary opener, whereas the one on the receiving end was a being that possessed longevity and had her own convictions.

Just as Ji Zhixiu herself didn’t believe that a Primordial Witch’s dream realm could descend in Norzin, it wasn’t too surprising that Doris doubted Mr. Lin’s greatness.

Ji Zhixiu shook her head. “I understand your doubts, but the Truth

Union isn't an unquestionable organization and has absolute authority. They too, don't have an omnipotent god to rely on, do they?

"I am just expounding the truths I have witnessed for myself. Mr. Lin is a true recluse and even the Truth Union's surveillance network had no way of detecting his existence. Moreover, he doesn't seek to gain a reputation for himself."

With a look of yearning, she went on, "As I just said previously, he's a great being that's come to spread the gospel in our world."

"In times worse than this, it was him who showed me a way out of the darkness by providing me guidance, strength, and encouragement. It was only thanks to him that I was able to achieve victory over those enemies and exact my revenge."

Noticing the resolute expression Ji Zhixiu had, Doris responded, "Looks like you have a firm conviction, just like our belief in Lady Silver. In all this time, we have never given up on the covenant created during Walpurgis Night."

"He gave me everything that I have now." Ji Zhixiu stood up with a smile and tore off the bandages on her arms.

Rolls of bandages fell to the floor with a slight rustling, revealing pale, practically unblemished skin that had not even the slightest bit of scar.

Doris had personally tended to these wounds and naturally, she knew the severity of these injuries was as if an ordinary human was trampled over by several elephants.

More importantly, these wounds were caused by aetheric attacks that would greatly diminish the physical body's regeneration. But now, there wasn't a single wound remaining in barely ten minutes after Ji Zhixiu woke up.

This was the ultimate power of dream beast blood.

When Ji Zhixiu regained consciousness, the two currencies of life which were blood and soul started to flow and her body began to

heal completely in a rapid metabolic process.

She clenched her fist, and an explosive power hidden in this human body surged, flowing within the beast blood.

Doris' expression changed slightly and she picked up the spoon and drank a mouthful of soup. Following that, she said, "I somewhat believe you. The bookstore owner Mr. Lin whom you mention seems really amazing."

She could sense that vibrant beast blood, and it really seemed like the woman before her had a dangerous aura of a predator eyeing its prey.

Ji Zhixiu un-clenched her fist and then removed the remaining bandages on her body. "That goes without saying. He is the most charitable and kindhearted higher being I have ever seen. This generous gift was casually handed over to me by him."

Doris smiled, "Alright, when the rain stops, I will definitely return to visit that bookstore owner of yours with an open mind. I hope he will be able to answer my queries."

Ji Zhixiu responded gladly, "I believe that you will receive the most satisfactory answer."

"I hope so..." Doris' pursed lips curled up into a slight smile. "What are you planning to do next? Continue fighting your enemies?"

Ji Zhixiu nodded. "I'll inform my subordinates to come pick me up. However, I'll need a bit of time to understand the current circumstances. Hence, I probably have to remain here for a couple of days. I'm sorry to trouble you."

"It's fine," said Doris as she kept away the bowls and utensils. With a bright smile, she pointed to the only partition in the room. "I've already prepared hot water in the bathroom. Go ahead and have a nice relaxing bath. It's also time to change your clothes too."

The clothes Ji Zhixiu was currently wearing weren't her own. Doris had probably helped her change into an airy white dress when she had been out cold. However, her vigorous actions when she came to

had caused blood to seep through the bandages and stain the white dress.

It appeared that Doris had taken this into consideration and had prepared hot water beforehand. This elf really did have a kindly nature.

Ji Zhixiu gave her thanks and headed over to the bathroom, not forgetting to bring along her cane.

Doris hummed as she chucked the bowls and spoons into the sink before turning on the tap. An icy smile appeared on her face as she stared at her reflection in the water.

She extended a finger and made a cutting motion on the water's surface. "Nobody besides the four Primordial Witches can truly be called omniscient... There has never been a shortage of capable phonies in this world. But if you aren't capable enough, don't blame a disappointed customer for taking action."

Outside, the furry corpse of a hunter pinned to the wall by an aether-imbued arrow swayed in the breeze as it finally dissipated completely into ashes.

A decapitated dog's head lay on the garbage heap to the side.

This had been the source of the fresh dog meat soup...

"Still no word from the one we sent to track her?"

"Yes, there's been confirmation that we have lost contact with Abnormal-rank hunter 'Chaser' Buck."

Heris frowned. It really did seem like the Ji Family's young mistress was truly hard to deal with. "Where was contact lost? What does Scarlet Cult say?"

"... I don't know."

Baam!

Heris smashed his fist against the table, losing his air of grace. Wrinkles on the corner of his eyes made him look especially sinister, just like a lame, aged lion refusing to give up its position as leader of the pride. Following that, Heris bellowed, "What do you mean you don't know?!"

His subordinate uttered a trembling reply, "All traces were completely removed and even magic identification didn't work. So, so it's..."

Heris took a deep breath and hissed coldly, "Continue searching then, Find her no matter the cost."

"Yes."

"One more thing. What about Charles? How is his condition?"

"He's completely awake. Uri preserved his corpse very well and Scarlet Cult's 'Precant' Morphey has already resurrected it and filled it up with the required will."

Finally a bit of good news at last.

"Charles... Wilde's favorite disciple according to the information that rat Ruen left behind. That was also the reason why Uri killed him off."

I wonder, what would he do when his own disciple returns from the dead and tries killing him?

Hopefully, he will be able to provide the energy required to hatch the Magic Ovum Mirror...

Chapter 40 Fates Choice

Chapter 40: Fate's Choice

Wilde once had two disciples. This was when he was still an ordinary Pandemonium-rank black magician and even before he got the name 'Faceless Black-scaled Man'.

As the source of a black magician's power was through language, it was extremely rare for self-taught black magicians to emerge. Practically all black magicians had their own teachers.

Language had to be spread via communication. Accuracy of pronunciation would determine the resonance with the aether as well as the strength of the incantation. This also signified that the passing on of skills amongst black magicians required a great deal of communication.

Without a responsible teacher to hold one's hand and provide face-to-face guidance, self-taught black magicians would only be able to exhibit some shoddy incantations such as 'Slippery Ground' and 'Candle Extinguishing'.

Who could imagine that the true form of such piteous incantations were actually 'Corrosive Swamp' and 'Wind-bound Seal'?

Moreover, compared with the tightly wrapped writing and sigils of white magicians, black magician's languages had the lowest learning threshold amongst extraordinary beings. The only requirement needed was just 'producing a sound'.

This was the reason why there were so many black magicians of the lower rungs that were completely insignificant. It was little wonder that the Church of the Dome blacklisted black magicians from treatment due to how broke they generally were.

Black magicians without rank yet did grunt jobs for other factions were a dime a dozen.

However, because of this black magician tradition of imparting, the relationship between a truly reliable teacher and student was extremely close. Most of the time, the trust between teacher and student was even greater than blood ties.

Wilde naturally had his own teacher as well.

One of the three Supreme-rank black magicians in the Truth Union's rankings list. 'Ancient King of Sacred Sound', 'Black Emperor', 'Dragon Linguist', 'Last Descendant of Giants'— Slater Augustus.

It was really difficult to keep track of how many apprentices this legendary black magician had mentored. However, one thing was certain. All of the black magicians he mentored eventually became reputable powerhouses.

Wilde had always thought himself fortunate that a person of insignificant status like himself could become the student of such a great being.

His final graduation piece was the stone gargoyle he had presented to Lin Jie.

Wilde remembered the overwhelming gratitude he felt all those years ago when he went before his aged teacher to present his final work.

Augustus' huge shriveled body was practically fused to his throne— That throne was the last domain of his native homeland, the Giant Kingdom which he had no way of leaving.

The old black magician reached for the stone gargoyle and studied it for some time before flashing a kindly and gratified smile and saying, "Fate has already made its choice. My dear disciple, from today on, you have graduated."

Young Wilde hadn't thought too much about these words and only proceeded to inquire his teacher's evaluation of his work.

After receiving the evaluation that this was "close to a near-perfect masterpiece", Wilde was so excited he couldn't sleep for a few days as he completed the necessary formalities and graduated from his

apprenticeship.

Those words of little significance said earlier were tossed to the back of his mind. It was only when Wilde's inspiration was overflowing from reading *Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies* did he once again dream of his old teacher's words.

"Perhaps, Teacher had already seen my fate where I would receive Mr. Lin's guidance and present the stone gargoyle to him. Perhaps this was the true answer that Teacher was very satisfied with," Wilde muttered as he got up and stared at the random notes strewn all over in a daze. He suddenly picked up a draft and uttered, "Burn."

Whoosh!

A flame sprung up and devoured the paper bit by bit.

In this dark room, a moth was attracted to the flame and caught fire.

Wilde watched pensively as the paper started to curl at the edges, wrinkle, and eventually turn to ashes along with the moth and crumbled to the ground.

He once had two disciples who were as close as sons to him.

On the day when Wilde had formally graduated from his teacher, he returned to the orphanage where he had grown up and brought away a child who was like him the most; one who was a loner that lurked in the corners.

That child's name was Charles, and also Wilde's first disciple.

Regrettably, it was perhaps Wilde's favoritism towards Charles that caused him to lose the alertness a black magician ought to have.

In the end, this led to Charles dying at the hands of an enemy of Wilde's.

Even though Wilde had exacted revenge for his disciple later on, he had been unable to find Charles' corpse and soul.

Without these two components, it would be impossible to resurrect his own disciple even if he sought out Augustus' help.

Wilde wasn't willing to share his innermost thoughts with anyone and even harbored the feeble hope that 'perhaps Charles wasn't dead, he had just run away'.

"Thinking back, rather than saying I had taken on a disciple, it would have been more appropriate to say that I adopted a kid only to worry about him all day long," mused Wilde.

He then brushed away the ashes, lit up an oil lamp, and sighed, "I really don't know what was going through my mind then."

Knock knock.

A sudden knocking echoed.

Wilde paused and halted whatever he was doing as his gaze went upwards and he sent out a scouting spell.

He was currently in the basement of this dwelling and the knocking had come from the main door on the first floor.

This was his apartment in Norzin, and also his safest secret hideout. At present, nobody knew about it.

Even after Uri's betrayal, this place had never been exposed before. Because, the only people who knew about this place were himself and... Charles.

Aether projected by Wilde produced an outline of the person at the door.

Wilde's eyes widened as a look of disbelief took over his entire face.

How... is this possible?!

"Teacher, it's me. I've returned!" A weak voice sounded beyond the door. "It's me, Charles. Are you there?"

...

Wilde got up from his desk in a rush and his large actions caused the chair to flip.

The heavy winds and rains outside continued to rage on as he climbed up from his basement. Meanwhile, Charles called out, "Teacher, it's been three years... I've been thinking of you all this time. You probably know that the black magician Fred wanted to take revenge on you by killing me. However, I didn't die and so he tossed me into a fissure of the dream realm.

"I recalled ***Dream Realm Guide*** which you let me read before. This was my guidebook that saved my life! It is also the reason I'm able to return here!"

His shouts became gasps as if he was getting tired and the voice got softer and softer. "Are you there? I'll be here waiting for you, just like that time where you appeared before me at the orphanage..."

Wilde opened the door. Half lying on the ground was his young disciple as per his memory, just that cuts and wounds covered the entire body and he was unconscious.

Wilde's aether already covered a radius of one kilometer around and he didn't detect any anomalies.

A complex expression appeared on that scary and ice-cold face of his.

"Welcome home, Charles."

Chapter 41 The Farmer And The Viper

Chapter 41: The Farmer And The Viper

6.30 a.m. Lin Jie opened his eyes at the sound of his alarm clock ringing and began an ordinary day as per usual.

It was the same routine every day for three years. Waking up, changing, washing up.

“Somehow it increasingly seems like something isn’t quite right...”
Lin Jie couldn’t help ridiculing himself in the mirror.

His general appearance didn’t seem to have changed much, and he still possessed that deceit...no, persuasive ability. However, from a minute aspect, he was already completely different.

Yet, he couldn’t tell how exactly he was different.

It was as if Lin Jie had been given a modifier software and forced to speak. From his original base, it was as if he had turned in to the head speaker of a Multilevel marketing firm.

This wasn’t a negative connotation. Just that originally, he would have to chat a little first, provide some guidance followed by flashing a professional smile and the other party would view this life mentor Lin Jie in a glowing light.

But now, with some slight exaggeration, if someone were to ask Lin Jie to be a priest, all he probably had to do was don priest robes and give an appropriate smile.

“Perhaps someone might even do a confession on the spot,” he chuckled mockingly as he kneaded his cheeks and could feel the outline of those extra few teeth.

Lin Jie trusted his own eyesight and memory and was certain he

hadn't perceived it wrongly.

However, given the sudden appearance of eight teeth, Lin Jie didn't find the new developments too surprising. However, the appearance of extra teeth was problematic.

In Buddhism, Buddha was said to have the 'Thirty-two Marks of a Great Man' and 'forty teeth' was one of these characteristics.

Forty teeth symbolized Buddha's avoidance of harsh words and treating all people with benevolence and kindness.

From other unofficial historical accounts, it was said that Laozi also had forty teeth.

[TL Note: Laozi is an ancient Chinese philosopher and the founder of philosophical Taoism]

Forty teeth symbolized a 'perfect person'.

Naturally an academic specializing in folklore studies like Lin Jie definitely knew about the symbolism of eight extra teeth. Just that he didn't bother to delve into researching this stuff.

In his process of studying folklore and popular customs, Lin Jie would often encounter some bizarre things that were hard to explain. However, Lin Jie would just treat it as something inconsequential, and merely make a record of the source material.

He was a folklore studies academic and not a scientist that searched for answers.

"But isn't this a little excessive?" sighed Lin Jie as he made his way downstairs. "I'll ask Blackie when he appears again."

No matter how much he thought about it, Blackie was probably the only one who could answer his doubts.

After all, Lin Jie didn't know too many people in this world and the majority were all his customers. Each of these people needed him to dole out chicken soup from time to time. As their spiritual pillar and life mentor, wouldn't asking them such a question destroy the

image each of them had of Lin Jie?

Moreover, how could he even speak to others about this matter? Could he even randomly tell others that he had suddenly grown eight new teeth?

Haa, that would definitely scare others. Forget it, I don't want to be like that Melissa brat and give others unnecessary and strange inconveniences. Lin Jie shook his head as he thought to himself.

He headed over to the counter and did a little simple tidying up. Then, as he was about to set the electric kettle to boil, he suddenly heard a knocking on his door.

With skepticism, Lin Jie turned his head towards the entrance. Normally, there wouldn't be any customers at this sort of time. Moreover, there shouldn't be anyone willing to get up so early and come over to his rundown bookstore in such horrible weather.

Now that Lin Jie thought about it, he reckoned that it would probably be a regular customer.

Although the sky was as dusky as ever, Lin Jie was able to see the silhouette of the person outside and found it familiar.

“Old Wil?”

The silhouette outside uttered a response while withdrawing his umbrella and keeping it away.

Now certain that his guess was right, Lin Jie walked over and opened the door. “Welcome...”

Deep down though, he was wondering. *Why has Old Wil returned that quickly? Three visits within two weeks, this is almost half his quota for the past two years.*

Lin Jie felt that half a month wasn't enough for Old Wil to have thoroughly mastered **Ceremonies And Customs**. Moreover, all this wasn't in something in Old Wil's domain of study so it was probably something impossible to achieve.

After all, this touched upon two different cultures. Without learning from the basics, it would be just like studying about ancient ways in modern times and one would only be able to get a rough understanding.

But from what Old Wil had said previously, this book had given him a great deal of inspiration and enlightenment, probably in terms of his own sphere of research.

Lin Jie had similar experiences like this before. In times like this, it's best to take such an opportunity to bury one's head in research and churn out study results.

Old Wil had been the same way in the previous times. He could disappear for months on end after borrowing a book and would only return several months later.

It doesn't seem normal if he's returning in such a short time frame. Could something have happened?

Ding Ding.

Feeling doubtful, Lin Jie opened the door. Indeed, it was Old Wil standing outside.

As usual, Old Wil was dressed in a tidy old suit and his iconic gentleman's hat. His black umbrella was kept away beside the door and water was still dripping off it.

He looked up towards Lin Jie, his eyes hidden beneath his mask revealing a look of reverence. He took off his hat and bowed slightly. "Mr. Lin, good morning."

"Morning."

Lin Jie returned the smile and opened the door all the way, allowing Old Wil to enter. Then, he returned back to the counter, shut off the electric kettle, and poured a cup of hot water for Old Wil.

"Something urgent this early, Old Wil? If I was still asleep, you might have been frozen outside. The likelihood of accidents

occurring is high at your age. Remember to pay more attention to your own safety in the future.

“Many people nowadays have cold hearts and would even be unwilling to help the elderly as they don’t want inconveniences.

“Haa... Actually, we can’t blame them either. Old Wil... Have you heard of the story of ‘The Farmer And The Viper?’”

Chatting with customers was part of fostering a closer relationship.

Moreover, Old Wil would probably be a little tired having rushed over so early in the morning. Immediately asking “Do you wish to borrow a book” might be a little too callous so Lin Jie decided to tell a little story to start the ball rolling.

Wilde shook his head.

“The story is very simple, yet worth thinking about——

“One winter a Farmer found a Viper frozen and numb with cold, and out of pity picked it up and placed it in his bosom.

“The Viper was no sooner revived by the warmth than it turned upon its benefactor and inflicted a fatal bite upon him.”

Lin Jie poured himself a cup of water as he rambled on. With a chuckle, he mused, “However, if you collapsed at my door, I definitely wouldn’t just leave you lying there. We are friends after all.”

Of course, a qualified teacher wouldn’t forget to provide an after-class interactive assignment.

“Old Wil, who do you think is at fault in this story? The farmer, or the viper? As he lay dying, would the farmer blame himself for being ignorant or would he blame the snake for being cruel and indifferent?”

Wilde looked up into those profound eyes of the bookstore owner and his entire body shuddered, causing some stray droplets to escape the cup in his hands.

Chapter 42 Do You Understand?

Chapter 42: Do You Understand?

Lin Jie was rather satisfied with what he considered a deep, thought-provoking opener.

An hour in the morning is worth two in the evening.

Just like how a composition needed a good introduction and thesis statement to outline one's viewpoint.

On such a fine morning where there was already a customer, starting the day with a classic fable couldn't have been any better.

Indeed, this story had been deliberately narrated for Old Wil.

An empty nester like Old Wil needed to maintain vigilance and care in his ordinary everyday life.

Today, Old Wil had come over before Lin Jie had even opened the shop.

Everyday, Lin Jie would get up at 6.30 a.m. and open for business at 7. It was ten minutes away from his opening time and the sky outside was still pitch black and no different from night.

Old Wil lived quite a distance away from the bookstore. Judging from their past conversations, it required approximately an hour's journey to reach here.

Heavy rain, lightning, and strong gales made traveling along slippery ground slightly dangerous in this darkness.

In such horrendous weather, Old Wil had traveled quite a distance all by himself early in the morning. If any accidents were to happen along the way, perhaps nobody would even notice it and Old Wil might just vanish quietly in the heavy downpour without anyone

knowing.

These weren't merely Lin Jie's groundless fears. Previously, the news had reported several buildings collapsing and it hadn't occurred too far away from here. Clearly, the outside situation was rather dangerous right now.

Wouldn't an aged and crippled man out gallivanting in this weather be a perfect recipe for a tragedy?

Alas, how worrying...

At this moment, Wilde was feeling as if a bolt of lightning had struck his heart. His hand holding on to the cup trembled slightly.

After forcibly controlling the tremors, he answered, "The farmer wasn't wrong. He was merely showing kindness. The snake wasn't at fault either, it was merely exhibiting its instincts."

Lin Jie strolled over to his seat behind the counter and sat down. "A decent and neutral opinion. In the end, this was a tragic outcome borne from coincidence. It appears that there isn't anything much to dispute about it.

"However, this story isn't a story on fairness. The farmer extended his so-called kindness and yet it resulted in his death. What do you think goes through his mind just before he dies?"

Wilde stayed silent for some time before he muttered, "Probably regret."

Lin Jie smiled. "Have more confidence in yourself, remove the word 'probably'. This is a story about humanism and requires one to ponder from the viewpoint of a person.

"Now, change your viewpoint. If you were this farmer, what would you be thinking about?

"The farmer's greatest regrets would definitely have been his inability to see through the snake's intrinsic nature from the start and why he himself had such unnecessary and blind kindness.

“There are many bad people in the world but not every one of them would have the face of a bad person. Some may have disguises or some might use others. A seemingly harmless and pitiful person can make use of feelings to do bad. Perhaps to you, or perhaps to others.

“Do not trust easily, and do not deceive others. Most importantly, do not be softhearted.

“If one does not have a heart, how can he be touched by you? Such a person might smile at you merely because he feels happy at you letting your guard down.”

Powerful and resonating words were thrown out by Lin Jie.

Wilde’s emotions got more and more conflicted and miserable as he met the bookstore owner’s stern warning gaze. When he heard the line “He does not have a heart”, Wilde’s eyes narrowed and he relaxed his clenched fist.

Beneath the mask, a self-derisory smile appeared on his face.

Haa... Can one still be alive if he doesn't have a heart?

No!

So, Mr. Lin actually... No, he still knows.

“Do you understand all that I’m saying, Old Wil?” Lin Jie crossed his arms and watched him.

Wilde took a deep breath and nodded. “Yes.”

But he still...

“It’s good if you do,” Lin Jie said with satisfaction.

He reached out and poured more tea for Wilde.

Lin Jie then took a hard look at Wilde once more. Besides his unusual visit today, Wilde seemed preoccupied with something and had a gloomy expression on his face.

A thought came into Lin Jie's mind.

Old Wil had left home early in the morning without a care for his own safety and specially came running to the rundown bookstore. However, it didn't seem like he had any desire to borrow or purchase books.

On the contrary, after their short chat, Old Wil seemed much more relaxed as if a great weight had been lifted off his mind.

That meant to say that Old Wil's intention was to have a heart-to-heart chat.

Teacher Lin who was rather adept at solving psychological issues raised an eyebrow. It didn't seem like a simple matter.

Firstly, Old Wilde had come to return the book not too long ago and had given Lin Jie the dream-catcher as thanks.

Therefore, it wasn't any academic troubles but rather... it was a life problem.

A widowed elderly living all by himself would surely face many troubles in life. However, being all alone for so long and getting used to such circumstances meant that most trifles wouldn't pose much of a problem.

Therefore, what remained was the other huge problem that troubled old widowed individuals.

Relatives.

And from what Lin Jie knew, Old Wil didn't have any other relatives, just two children that weren't very good to him. Both of them were adopted.

One had gone away for work and hadn't returned in many years nor was there any news from him.

The other was even more shameless and turned against Old Wil when he found his birth parents. Old Wil would get extremely upset every time this was brought up.

Lin Jie felt that it was basically impossible for the latter to return.

Moreover, Old Wil wouldn't be acting this way if he did return and would have a black face instead.

Therefore, it could only be the former.

"Haa, I still want to say that regarding Charles..."

Lin Jie decided to try putting out some feelers.

Wilde sighed. "Yes, of course you knew. He has returned."

Lin Jie nodded his head. He now had a clearer picture since Old Wil had put it like this.

A common trope portrayed in many serial dramas on television was how widowed elderly divided their assets and inheritance.

When an old person living all on his own suddenly fell ill, a whole bunch of strange relatives would come running over.

And when those relatives away for many years and not finding much success outside came running back suddenly, the reason was mostly just one thing—money.

"Although what I say might upset you, I still feel the need to warn you," Lin Jie said. "Did he return all of a sudden? Did he tell you about his hardships over the past few years, how he misses you, loves you, and other such stuff that makes you warm and fuzzy inside?"

"In actuality, he might be implicitly trying to get you to promise something."

That's right, 'Charles' wanted Wilde to impart the remaining incantation techniques to him.

Even as a widely known cruel black magician, Wilde would still feel significantly dejected at such a tragic truth. Before he was a black magician, Wilde was first and foremost a person.

“What you wish for is the son that remains within the beautiful memories of your heart. However, is it really him that returned at this moment?” Lin Jie’s gaze intensified as he continued on heavily. “Even though saying this might be a little cruel, however, it’s like what I just said... Do you wish to become that farmer? Do you want to pass your sentiments to a venomous viper that has no feelings?”

Wilde was silent for some time. Finally, he sighed, “I just... wanted to accompany him a little more, even if it meant deceiving myself. However, some dreams have to be woken up from. He is no longer my Charles.

“Thank you. This is the second time you have given me such important guidance!” Wilde raised his head and said. “I know what I have to do...”

Chapter 43 Do Good Deeds Without Leaving A Name Behind

Chapter 43: Do Good Deeds Without Leaving A Name Behind

“It’s all good if you know what to do. With your wisdom, I believe Old Wil will definitely handle this matter properly.”

Lin Jie continued on with a sigh. “I know this might be a little difficult to bear as he is your son. However, you might regret even more in the future if you don’t do so.”

Alas, facing the truth is painful indeed. But the sooner a money-grubbing fellow like this is exposed, the better it will be for both Old Wil and society.

Lin Jie was just this sort of kind soul that does good deeds without leaving a name behind.

Wilde was aged and lacked affection, so being deceived wasn’t out of the ordinary. However, as a friend, Lin Jie felt that he definitely needed to step out and remind Wilde at such times.

There were three types of friends that are advantageous. Upright, sincere, and knowledgeable.

[TL Note: A Confucius saying]

Although Lin Jie felt he couldn’t be all three, he still felt the need to give proper guidance when witnessing such a situation.

“Right now, you have chosen to indulge and that didn’t just land you in unfavorable circumstances, it is also a great disrespect to the memory of Charles in your heart. It’s mistake after mistake by choosing to go down this way. Do you really want to completely destroy him? Rather than regretting after it’s too late, why not leave

behind that last bit of beautiful memory?”

Yes, the returning Charles... was just but an empty shell. The actual Charles had died a long time ago.

How could Wilde attempt to deceive himself and treat the corpse before his eyes as Charles?!

That was utterly insulting to the memory of his disciple!

At this moment, Wilde was completely ashamed of himself but his gaze turned cold as he suddenly came to a realization. After some time, he uttered, “You are right. I was muddled this time. I will deal with this matter as soon as possible.”

Those people that toyed with his feelings by using Charles were the ones that truly needed to be ‘dealt with’.

Wilde wasn’t oblivious to the truth. It was just that he clung on to the memory of his disciple, allowing himself to be voluntarily deceived to relive those times with his disciple...

Once this whole episode was over, what was meant to die would still be dead.

However, his actions had led to an even greater risk, immersing him in a confused state where he couldn’t determine between truth and false.

If he hadn’t come over to the bookstore in his perplexed state, Wilde might really have continued imparting his incantations to ‘Charles’ out of guilt. And once those pulling the strings from the shadows obtained the last benefits, it was obvious what they wanted to do.

This was an out-and-out assassination attempt. Moreover, it had very nearly succeeded.

But fortunately, Mr. Lin’s words were like the sharp cries of those Northern monks, making him snap awake in an instant.

Lin Jie nodded and exhorted, “You must be decisive and not do a

halfhearted job. A certain degree of ruthlessness must be used to deal with this sort of people, if not, they might easily return to haunt you.”

In society nowadays, youths like these were punks and hoodlums. Without properly making clear one’s stance, punks like these would not cease being bothersome.

Wilde flashed a weak smile. “Don’t worry. I won’t give him a second chance.”

Thoroughly eradicating the source. This was the method Wilde was very well versed with.

Right now, those pulling the strings from the shadows would surely be laughing away. It was time to strike directly when they weren’t prepared to react.

It just so happened that Wilde had gained some enlightenment regarding corpses and death from reading Mr. Lin’s work. His level of mastery over incantations had improved considerably and he was very willing to experiment.

Lin Jie took a sip of tea and said contently, “That’s the Old Wil I know! Your dispirited state just now looked just like how you were two years ago. Frankly, it made me somewhat disappointed. I’m still hoping that you would read more books and step away from the past.”

An empty nester like Old Wil would find the spiritual aspect of life severely lacking and had quite a bit of emotional needs. However, the current circumstances wouldn’t satisfy his needs.

Thus, Lin Jie occasionally indirectly instilled some fighting spirit so that he could deal with this matter with more enthusiasm which might be a good approach.

‘Disappointed’? Not good!

Wilde’s face stiffened. Mr. Lin had given him ***Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies*** in hopes that he would help spread its contents. And then... restore the glory of this faith or perhaps

establish a new one.

In any case, this book being given to him for research was equivalent to being entrusted with an invisible mission.

However, not only had Wilde failed to make any progress, he had gotten himself caught up in some trouble. That wouldn't do at all.

And now, these words were like a knock on the head and a reminder— *You should be propagating the doctrine! Stop wallowing! You are now supposed to be working for me!*

"I've seen your expectations and the help you have provided from your book. Please forgive my mistake. When this matter is settled, I'll no longer let you down."

Lin Jie waved his hands dismissively and chuckled, "There's no need to be so serious. Just visit more often and tell others about this place. That, for me, would be all I hope for."

Indeed, the selfless and giving bookstore owner hoped that he would disseminate these teachers.

"I understand. There will be an upcoming gathering soon. At that time, I'll make your voice heard."

"Oh? I shall anticipate it eagerly then."

Wilde sat and chatted with Lin Jie for quite some time till he finished his tea before bidding farewell in much better spirits.

Charles opened the door and smiled warmly at the old man outside. "Ahh, Teacher! You've returned."

The handsome young man had a look of reverence as he gazed at his teacher.

He reached out to help Wilde with his umbrella, before limping inside.

Naturally, it was impossible to return from a dream realm fissure unscathed. Losing a leg was testament to the suffering Charles had gone through.

Wilde had a pained look as he watched his disciple walk. But after a deep breath, he managed to calm down. "Charles, go bring my ceremonial knife. You know where it's kept."

One who could accomplish such a perfect resurrection technique was probably of the same rank as himself.

That meant to say that there was a Destructive-rank black magician behind Charles' resurrection.

Charles grunted in acknowledgment and kept the umbrella away. "Are you going to test an incantation?"

Wilde replied calmly, "Mm, there's a very important incantation that I've got to test out. There are also some preparations I must do. Hurry on then, I'll need your help in a bit."

"I will definitely do my best," said Charles with a nod before he went to fetch his teacher's ceremonial knife.

He knew that his teacher's most commonly used sorcery tool was that obsidian ceremonial knife and hence, he didn't think too much about it.

As he was returning from the room where the sorcery tools were kept, Charles wondered how long more it would take for him to accomplish his mission...

He handed the ceremonial knife to Wilde and watched as the old man smiled kindly, then extended his hand.

Squelch!

The black obsidian knife pierced through Charles almost effortlessly.

The young man's eyes widened with shock and the last scene he saw as he crashed down was a spread of pitch-black aether on the

ground like a carpet of thorns that covered his vision.

“Rest in peace, my child. There is tranquility in death itself.”

Wilde watched as the blanket of thorns shrouded the corpse and blood-red threads that were like puppet strings peeled off from the flesh of the corpse. “Coffin of Eternal Rest... It’s you after all—Morphey!”

With his ceremonial knife, Wilde cut through each and every aether string that joined the user and subject.

‘Scarlet Cult’ headquarters, secret prayer chamber.

Seated before the gloomy altar, ‘Precant’ Morphey’s face was illuminated by candle flame.

A circle of candles surrounded the altar and in the center was a notch that was filled with blood.

Blood seeped out from holes on different sides, forming fine pillars that dripped down and dissipated upon hitting the ground like radiation and forming a huge and complex curse array.

Suddenly, the candles were extinguished and the pillars of blood ran dry.

Morphey’s eyes snapped open and she instinctively backed away in shock. “Wilde, how could he?!”

A terrifying backlash of the curse being forcefully stopped struck before she was finished.

Kraackk...

The altar split open rapidly, fragmenting and turning to ash as it collapsed. The huge amount of aetheric energy became unstable and flooded out like a torrent.

Morphey was sent flying as though she had been charged by

thousands of formless cavalry and crashed into the wall with a loud bang.

The entire secret prayer chamber collapsed.

Scarlet Cult black magicians rushed over to find everything in complete ruins as well as a massive crater with spider web-like cracks all around as a result of the torrential deluge of aether.

As well as the coughing Morpheus who clambered out from underneath the rubble.

Chapter 44 Killing With A Borrowed Sword

Chapter 44: Killing With A Borrowed Sword

Morphey got to her feet with some difficulty.

She was covered in blood and her elegant nun gown was now tattered and revealed the outlines of her curvaceous body.

She stood expressionlessly in the center of the wreckage and surveyed the surrounding destruction, as well as the massive crater around her.

A black coffin buried within the earth had appeared in the central point of the crater where the altar had been. On it, several pale skeletons with outstretched hands seemed as though they were fighting to grasp the red gemstone embedded in the middle of the coffin.

‘Coffin of Eternal Rest’.

This was the iconic sorcery artifact used by the Destructive-rank black magician, ‘Precant’ Morphey.

In general, most magician’s sorcery tools were merely items that provided assistance or simplified processes. In the end, the power of a spell lay in the amount of aether mustered as well as one’s combat abilities.

For example, when using blaze incantations, low-level magicians would employ tools such as gunpowder and sulfur, whereas high-level magicians only needed to chant a curse.

Therefore, the impression most people had of black magicians were secretive dark-robed beings that carried all sorts of strange magical tools on them like the ignition materials when using blaze incantations.

All of these were simply supplementary and could slightly increase the strength of a spell. However, such tools wouldn't have a great effect.

However, when it came to a sorcery tool possessing extraordinary power, the uses of such a tool would far exceed being just supplementary.

On the other hand, the Coffin of Eternal Rest was a powerful sorcery tool with the capacity of 'resurrection'. It was an extremely dangerous taboo article.

Morphey had used the Coffin of Eternal Rest to resurrect Wilde's disciple Charles and turned him into her own puppet with the aim of getting close to Wilde and killing him.

This wasn't a plan that had been concocted overnight.

The entire procedure of this plan had been conceived back when Wilde's other disciple Uri was still alive.

According to what Uri had said, his teacher's favoritism towards Charles was like a father's love and not how a teacher treated a disciple.

As a more talented fellow disciple, Uri ultimately killed Charles out of envy one day and then defected.

Although Wilde was a Destructive-rank black magician, he had once been defeated by Joseph and possessed such a mortal weakness.

Thus, he would be the best nourishment for the Magic Ovum Mirror.

As a black magician of similar rank, Morphey had past interactions with Wilde before. From her judgment, she was rather certain that Wilde, who didn't dare show himself after the battle two years ago, was no longer as powerful as before.

Yet surprisingly, despite harboring this line of thought and proceeding carefully and using Wilde's weakness in this attempted assassination, the entire plan had actually failed?!

Everything had been going very smoothly.

Up until just a while ago...

Wilde merely stepped out for half an hour but upon returning, he stabbed Charles whom he treated as his own son to death without the slightest bit of hesitation.

What exactly happened in between?

How did he suddenly discover the truth and how was he able to have that much resolve?!

From how he was before, he shouldn't have been able to act so decisively even if he discovered the truth!

“Damn it, what exactly did he get up to?”

Morphey took deep breaths and waved her arms vigorously, once again arranging the formless and chaotic aether.

Swoosh!

Rain falling from the heavens was stopped outside of an invisible barrier, forming an odd waterfall-like phenomenon.

The collapsed chambers were reconstructed once more and the cratered ground returned to its original state.

Threads of blood extended from the corpses of black magicians that had been killed in this accident as they were resurrected by the Coffin of Eternal Rest, becoming new puppets that got to their feet shakily.

Other black magicians at the side were accustomed to such sights and continued to carry on cleaning up the mess.

A black magician stepped out from the crowd and did a half kneel.
“Madam Morphey.”

Cough cough...

Morphey coughed lightly and wiped away the blood on the corner of her mouth. She asked icily, “What is it?”

Pain was coursing throughout her entire body and she had lost a small portion of her soul that made her increasingly infuriated.

The risk factor for curses involving a soul was extremely huge, and it was no exception even for Destructive-rank black magicians.

Moreover, the one that broke this curse and causing the backlash had also been a Destructive-rank black magician.

Even though the other party was merely probing about and hadn’t brought about any truly substantial damage, Morphey felt utterly humiliated just based on this.

This represented being the loser when they crossed swords.

However, Morphey still believed that it wasn’t a disparity in their strength but rather a reversal caused by misinformation.

Originally, she was the one working in the shadows with a firm grasp on Wilde’s weakness and waiting to catch him off guard

Wilde’s sudden reversal had caused their positions to swap.

Wilde was the one who had caught Morphey off guard and she had become the victim.

The half-kneeling black magician answered respectfully. “White Wolf’s leader Heris has come to visit. He wishes to meet you.”

“Heris?” Morphey raised a hand, causing the blood on her body and the surroundings to converge into a glossy blood orb which she kept in her gown. “What is he here for?”

Her subordinate replied at once, “He says that he knows the reason for why you failed.”

Morphey’s bitter grin froze. “... Let him in.”

“At once.”

Heris bowed politely to Morphey and said, “Madam Morphey, I’m honored to be able to meet you for the very first time... My previous visits never got the desired outcome. But at least I’ve finally gotten my wish today.”

Morphey had already changed into new nun’s robes.

Before she became a black magician, Morphey had been a nun in the Church of Pestilence, and had the responsibility of praying for the deceased. She only became a black magician after obtaining the Coffin of Eternal Rest as well as the previous owner’s teachings.

The abandoned Church of Pestilence chapel that Ji Zhixiu previously attacked had been a venue provided by her.

Morphey had an arrogant character and viewed the cooperating hunters with disdain.

Heris’ requests to meet had been rejected on his many visits and Morphey hadn’t revealed herself to him before.

Morphey’s gaze was both inquiring and menacing as she got straight to the point. “What gives you the confidence to know the reason behind my failure... Moreover, what makes you come scurrying over from hunter territory before it even happened?

“If you aren’t able to convince me, I would have a reason to suspect that you are involved.”

The pressurizing gaze of a Destructive-rank made Heris break out in cold sweat. His face had gone rigid but he was still able to force out a slight smile. “Forgive my bluntness, but I believe that the reason for this failure was... yourself.”

“Me?” Morphey’s eyes narrowed.

Heris replied calmly, “Do you still remember... the report of Uri’s death?”

Morphey hesitated for a slight moment before she spoke, “Of course

I do. That decaying flesh was the remains of some sort of dream realm parasite. Although it could kill a Pandemonium-rank, it has a short lifespan and wouldn't pose much threat."

"And so you gave the order to give up investigating the bookstore and focus all efforts to protecting the Magic Ovum Mirror." A cold glint flashed across Heris' eyes as he continued, "But did you know that Wilde had just visited that bookstore half an hour ago?"

"The one that caused Wilde to have such a sudden change and made your plan fail is the owner of that bookstore."

Chapter 45 Cosplay

Chapter 45: Cosplay

After sending away Wilde, Lin Jie pulled out a book from the shelves, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and began to browse through it.

This book was one of Freud's famous works as well as a groundbreaking piece on psychoanalysis.

As an unorthodox work published in an era way behind its time, many of the theories were discredited by scientists and caused a great deal of dispute.

Now, he was rereading this book to view it from a different line of thought and reasoning.

The theory in this book suggests that dreams were the unconscious desires and stimuli from childhood memories.

Dreams were also a truthful exchange between a person and his heart as well as the process of learning from himself.

Lin Jie had read this book before but he now wanted to do a little revision because of the recent dream he had.

As he browsed for a bit, Lin Jie felt idle and wondered if he should grab other relevant books to read as well.

At this time, the door to the bookstore was pushed open.

Hmm? Are there winds of fortune blowing? Why are customers coming one after another?

But thinking of it, this change seemed to occur on the day Old Wil gave me that stone gargoye.

Could it be that besides warding away ill-fortune and evil, it also has feng-shui properties of inviting wealth?

[TL note: Feng-shui is the practice of Chinese geomancy. It claims to use energy forces to harmonize individuals with surrounding environment]

Tsk, just borrowing books would do. Why give me a local specialty?

This makes me even busier than before and I'm even frequently being interrupted from my reading.

This... this is simply un...refusable! Bring on more troubles!

Lin Jie put down the book in his hand and put on his professional smile as he glanced over. "Welcome! Would you be borrowing, reading, or buying books? Also, feel free to ask if you have any queries."

"Can I really ask any question?" The lady that entered had a voice that was both gentle and pleasant.

From what Lin Jie saw, this new customer's nice and gentle appearance matched her voice.

Fair skin, blueish jade eyes, and a head of luxuriant gold hair gave her an air of astounding beauty. The entire gloomy bookstore seemed to light up with her appearance.

Lin Jie's gaze lingered on her ear. The pair of sharp, long ears definitely captured his attention.

His eyes continued downwards and noticed she was wearing a lengthy and white gown, its many layers of creases reminding Lin Jie of the togas that ancient Romans wore.

On a whole, she seemed just like a beautiful and graceful elf that had mistakenly wandered into a mundane world.

Could... could this be...

A cosplay with a high degree of originality?

Lin Jie was pleasantly surprised and even felt a wave of 'nostalgia'.

The activity of cosplaying was very common back on Earth that dated back to the times of ancient wandering minstrels putting on plays for the public.

And in the current era, cosplay thrived thanks to anime, movies, and games.

However, in Azir, this aspect wasn't really developed despite there being a television and entertainment industry. Furthermore, it lacked an even more important hub for subculture nor leaders.

Cosplay here was still stuck in the primitive stage of 'masquerades and costumes.'

Wanting to see accomplished levels of cosplay was really difficult. However, this customer before Lin Jie actually had a rather excellent standard.

Her makeup was on point and she even had the remarkable air of nobility that an elf ought to have.

For a moment, Lin Jie even thought that an actual elf was standing in front of him. Moreover, in this heavy rainstorm, a beautiful, blue-eyed, golden-haired elf entering the bookstore was like a scene from a fairy-tale.

Impressive indeed, young miss.

But of course, it was life-like and that was all to it.

A normal person like Lin Jie definitely wouldn't think that it was an actual elf standing before him.

After all, would an actual elf strut around a large city like Norzin without any worries about being captured and put on display as a rare specimen?

Nevertheless, Lin Jie found the type of question posed by this young miss somewhat familiar.

Upon further pondering, Lin Jie realized that this seemed like the sort of question asked by Melissa... the zealous bratty kid whom he

had recommended a half-set of Five-Threes not too long ago.

At that time, Melissa had asked, “Can you really help with anything?” In the end, that kid’s suggestion made Lin Jie understand that there were some customers that were indeed unruly and wanting to cause trouble.

That was also the reason why Lin Jie changed from asking “Can I help you with anything”, to “Feel free to ask if you have any queries”.

Don't tell me I've to reapply the same trick again today?

Previously, that brat contentedly left with half a set of Five-Threes. I wonder what sort of harvest will I get today?

Lin Jie carried a budding sense of anticipation as he maintained his smile. “Of course. As long as it is within the bookstore’s operations.”

During this time, Doris had also been scrutinizing Lin Jie.

Doris didn’t have on any disguise but she had concealed her presence beforehand.

In her opinion, since this bookstore owner was omniscient, he would certainly be aware that she was coming over to seek him out. And he would at least know that an elf was coming.

If he revealed any shock in his expression and didn’t even know this, it would mean that he wasn’t truly omniscient but a mere swindler.

Prior to this, Doris had expected the bookstore owner’s reaction to be either one of calm or astonishment.

However, she never imagined that the look in his eyes would be one of pleasant surprise, admiration as well as... reminiscence and affirmation?

Being pleasantly surprised and revealing admiration was still somewhat reasonable.

Since he didn't seem much too astonished at the arrival of an elf, it had to be said that he had already anticipated this.

Back then, even a hunter like Ji Zhixiu was astonished when she opened her eyes and saw Doris.

However, what was strange were the sentiments of reminiscence and recognition.

Doris was rather familiar with this sort of reminiscence because only beings with longevity would have such deep sense of reminiscence that transcended time.

However, the one before her was clearly a human.

Even more dubious was the affirmation... As if it was the affirmation an elder had towards young ones.

What could make a human gaze at an elf in such a manner?

Doris surveyed the surroundings, but didn't notice anything out of the ordinary besides the stone gargoyle sculpture. Thus, she continued using the aether to probe out the entire bookstore, including the bookstore owner himself.

He was practically just an ordinary person...

But as Doris smiled sweetly and made her way to the counter while still harboring doubts, her pupils suddenly contracted as she got close and saw the owner's appearance.

Even though he looked ordinary, if one was sharp enough, they would realize that this young man had teeth that were more tightly packed than most people.

Without a doubt.

Doris believed that she hadn't perceived wrongly.

According to the degree of density, this bookstore owner had full forty teeth.

This wasn't a disease nor was it fabricated. This was definitely something that violated the physiology of humankind.

He was definitely human!

But she had no way of determining what sort of entity he was at the moment...

"As long as it's within the bookstore's operations..."

Doris repeated this once and suddenly felt enlightened.

If the bookstore owner really possessed an all-knowing power as what that hunter mentioned, then perhaps being confined to the bookstore was the price he had to pay?

An unknown and ancient entity with the appearance of a human, possessing longevity and great power. However he was trapped in a small corner and hidden beneath the ordinary.

Then, surely, someone like him would have once known a certain entity of the Iris Clan?

While deep in thought, Doris suddenly sensed an aetheric flow. There was a primordial aura coming from the second floor of the bookstore!

This was...

Primordial Witch Lady Silver's aura! The name etched into the soul of the Iris Clan was shaking!

Her dream realm is here!

Chapter 46 Lin Jie's Old Profession

Chapter 46: Lin Jie's Old Profession

Lady Silver's aura!

Every elf of the Iris Clan definitely couldn't be mistaken when they sensed their own body shuddering.

On the second floor of this mediocre bookstore, approximately at where the bedroom was, there seemed to be what was the aura of this Primordial Witch's dream realm.

This meant that the dream realm of the ice-wielding witch, Silver, had descended here and was watching over someone.

And it was clear that the only one possibly being watched over was this young bookstore owner standing before Doris!

Could he be "the one blessed by the stars" from the prophecy?

Tumultuous thoughts were causing a ruckus in her mind.

She had only sought out the bookstore because she was skeptical about the hunter's words and was merely trying her luck. However, upon stepping in, it seemed as if the entire outcome had already been decided.

Coincidence was just the inevitability decreed by fate.

Could this be the destiny that Lady Silver has set up?

Doris seemed to understand this great being's will and guidance.

She had guided Doris to the blessed one before her and it meant that Lady Silver had the intention to reform a covenant with the Iris Clan.

However, Doris understood that Lady Silver hadn't yet made the final decision.

Otherwise, she could have just made her dream realm materialize at where the Iris Clan was and not go through such great troubles.

This indicated that Lady Silver's intention was still to wait and see.

Now, as an 'anointed' and the representative of the entire Iris Clan, it was possible that Doris was being observed and judged.

If she could smoothly reform a new covenant and bring the glad tidings back, the declining Iris Clan could rise up once again.

On the contrary, if she failed to do so, she could become the sinner that leads to the clan's demise.

She needed to proceed carefully.

Doris calmed herself mentally and tried not to reveal any sign of weakness.

She maintained her gentle smile and put on her most friendly display. "It's like this... I heard of the existence of this bookstore from Ji Zhixiu. She told me that she had received help that enabled her to resolve her own problems and that you were practically a god."

Lin Jie was somewhat surprised. He never expected that Ji Zhixiu would place him on such a high pedestal.

But for these youngsters, encountering relationship setbacks, especially the experience of being dumped by a scumbag, was undoubtedly like falling into an abyss.

Moreover, chancing upon the bookstore in a heavy rain and meeting a life mentor to point her in the right direction was like a plot straight out of a drama.

This inevitably caused Ji Zhixiu to develop a sense of dependence and reverence towards Lin Jie.

However this sort of mentality of idol-like reverence was undesirable of Lin Jie and he decided he needed to tell this affluent young miss the importance of thinking for oneself the next time they met.

Viewing the world from a scientific and rational view should be the correct mentality.

Being overdependent on others was not a good thing.

Lin Jie shook his head and chuckled, "A god? I'm not that great. That's quite some over exaggeration. I'm just an ordinary person that runs a bookstore and she probably relies on me a little too much."

Doris' impression of the bookstore owner opposite her had completely changed.

Originally, her speculation from Ji Zhixiu's words was that this fellow was excessively claiming himself to be omniscient and godly.

But looking at things now, this bookstore owner was really modest and it was Ji Zhixiu who viewed him as a god after being taken under his wing.

But...

Since he is someone close with Lady Silver, there isn't anything wrong with saying that he is comparable to a godly being.

"You are too modest," Doris said. "She expressed her respect for you very well. Upon knowing the predicament my clan and I are in, she asked me to come over and consult with you for any means to resolve my problem."

Clan? Lin Jie was momentarily stunned but he soon found himself enlightened after some considerations went through his mind.

Since Ji Zhixiu's family was so rich, being acquainted with clans and such was expected.

In Norzin, besides the upper city district where most ordinary folks

lived and the lower city district where the infected were, there was also the central district where those rich and powerful stayed.

Those noble clans with traditions passed on through the ages were practically all from there.

Haa... So it's a friend introduced by Ji Zhixiu. Rich people generally have rich friends. No wonder she has the ability to produce such a high level of cosplay.

Just like Joseph and his mechanical arm, this was something that most ordinary folk couldn't afford.

Then again, Old Wil had led to Joseph, and Melissa came because of Joseph. Now, this young miss before him was visiting the bookstore thanks to Ji Zhixiu.

It seemed like the relationships Lin Jie had fostered with his customers over a long time had finally started to pay off. His customers were now spontaneously promoting and spreading praise about his business!

This is just awesome!

Haa, it looks like I didn't give out enough suggestions previously.

Lin Jie folded his arms out of habit and looked straight at Doris. "So, what's your question?" he asked.

Although he spoke calmly, Lin Jie hadn't decided whether he would be resolving it.

After all, asking questions was free. So, he would first get a clearer picture before considering whether or not to solve the problem and how to go about it.

Regardless of whether it was relationship woes, psychological problems, or academic problems, Lin Jie could try helping to resolve them.

But if asked for help to solve a mathematics question, Lin Jie would have to apologize for rejecting the ask-er.

Doris could sense Lady Silver's will in the bookstore owner's questioning gaze. She felt as though she was seated on a cushion of needles and answered cautiously, "From ancient times, my clan has passed down the glory of the Iris flower. But ever since we lost our sustenance of faith, our clan has been on the decline and we have become wanderers without dreams. At present, we wish to rebuild our clan's past and let the Iris flower blossom once more."

Since Lady Silver had given her a sign, and had her dream realm descend on this place, it probably meant that she had given this being the right to pass judgment.

This bookstore owner opposite Doris had absolute clout, and she definitely needed to satisfy his requirements...

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow. *Oh? Doesn't this question concern his old profession?*

Folklore. But it wasn't something that could just be simply summarized by the words 'customs and traditions'.

It referred to the long term ethnic group or societal community produced over time that gradually formed their own traditions and culture passed down for generations.

This included arts, beliefs, family, calendar systems, and many other aspects.

This clan of hers had probably gone through some unforeseen accidents like war in their long history and their conviction had gradually gotten indistinct.

The failure to restore the significance of their clan's crest had cost this noble clan to have lost their status.

Then this lady was saying all this...

In hopes that Lin Jie would help her look up the clan's history and rediscover the significance of the family clan's crest. Or to put it simply, she needed a professional to help them 'fabricate' a relatively complete family clan history that they could concur with.

Followed by once again establishing themselves.

However, this required a reliable professional. Otherwise, if anyone were to perceive that something was amiss, it would become a problem for the clan's prestige.

However, this would no longer be just any small dose of chicken soup...

I've got to request for more money.

Lin Jie flashed a really dazzling and professional smile. "Nota problem, however..."

A strange expression appeared on Doris' face when Lin Jie was halfway through his sentence.

At this moment, a blinding beam of light from the outside illuminated the bookstore via the windows.

"However... it looks like I have new customers again."

Chapter 47 Please Be Safe

Chapter 47: Please Be Safe

“It looks like I have new customers again.”

Lin Jie observed the blinding white light shining through the windows and raised an eyebrow.

Are these... headlights?

But would anyone specifically drive all the way over here? The risk of driving outside in this weather was much more dangerous than walking.

There was simply nowhere to seek help should one get into an accident and the rescue teams would find it difficult in getting over.

Moreover, these lights were clearly aimed against the inside of the bookstore without any inclination of changing directions.

The road in front of the bookstore was horizontal and under most circumstances, nobody would just remain idle in the car before the pedestrian crossing.

Unless it was an idiot.

Moreover, given the heavy flow of water outside, even idiots would know that objects being swept away by flowing water could collide against the car and cause damages.

And even if that person were taking a U-turn, the vehicle's direction should have already changed by now.

But if the person driving wasn't an idiot, shining the head beams this way was really rude.

This arrival didn't seem to have friendly intentions.

Although Lin Jie had always been kindhearted and willing to help

others, he always remembered the phrase by the Chinese poet Lu Xun—"Don't be afraid to judge others with the worst-case scenario in mind."

He frowned as a thought popped into his mind.

Had his unlicensed shop status been finally exposed?

Three years ago, Lin Jie had gotten official identification papers in Norzin with the help of the young lady Qili, and had successfully opened for business with the aid of a local commerce association.

But at the end of it all, his store was still an unlicensed shop.

As long as there was an issue with the origin, no amount of covering up could prevent the truth from being eventually revealed.

Moreover, given the circumstances, Lin Jie had ample reasons to imagine that the outside scenario was like this—

A patrol car with the Norzin official emblem parked in the distance with its head beams on full power, shining its white headlights into the bookstore as a sign of deterrence and obstructing the vision within.

A handful of armed police officers silently braving through the rain with their sights firmly on the bookstore.

A higher-ranked in-charge holding a loud holler, ready to shout out a "Personnel inside, you have violated Norzin laws of illegal entry and counterfeit identity. Surrender at once."

—This was usually how police in movies panned out.

Of course, the reason for these guesses was actually because Lin Jie vaguely felt a hint of danger.

This likely scenario was his impression of danger.

But at the same time, he didn't feel too affected by this sense of danger... *Could it be Blackie's doing?*

With these thoughts, Lin Jie got up from his seat and wanted to take a better look.

But just as he stood up, Doris muttered, "Please wait. I will get rid of them at once. We will continue our chat when I return."

Ah?

Lin Jie blinked several times and realized that his new customer's expression was even more solemn than his own.

This sort of austere solemnness was as if she wanted to kill someone.

But because this young miss was gentle and good-looking, despite the cold, biting stare, her face didn't distort in rage unlike most people.

... Even in this world, people were judged by how they look.

But why would she suddenly get angry?

It isn't as if somebody suddenly cut her queue...

Wait a minute.

As a customer who had just requested for help, she had suddenly been interrupted by this newcomer just as Lin Jie was about to agree.

It's sort of similar to having her queue cut, huh?

And given the young lady's change in attitude when speaking, the ones outside were probably up to no good.

Lin Jie was seated at the counter as his sights were obstructed. However, the young lady was standing beyond the counter and could see the situation much clearer.

In this sense, Lin Jie's guess was more or less spot on.

Doris had a slight sneer on her face as she turned to look outside before she continued slowly, "How impudent to actually dare make

a move here.”

Indeed, whoever it was had come for Lin Jie.

Lin Jie had always been good at reading body language.

Although this young elf lady was angry, her overall poise was still rather un-flustered and she still maintained her manners when speaking with him.

Therefore, Lin Jie could well imagine that the rude bunch shining their head beams this way wouldn't pose much of a problem for this young miss.

Moreover, she was a friend of Ji Zhixiu and was from a 'clan'. A rich person is always better off than ordinary people and such a person would have some sort of power.

This wasn't any form of blind self-confidence.

However, the one before Lin Jie was still a delicate young lady and he couldn't help worrying. “Are you sure there's no problem? How about letting me handle it myself?”

Given Lin Jie's eloquence, stalling wouldn't be an issue.

He could then contact the old customer to resolve the issue later on.

On top of that, Lin Jie had actually been wanting to find out under what sort of circumstances would Blackie show up.

Since this hidden hand could transport Lin Jie from a whole different plane, it definitely had unimaginable power. However, it was always elusive and Lin Jie didn't have any way to make contact even if he wanted to.

Doris' expression became even more decisive when she heard what he said. She lifted the hems of her dress slightly and flashed a graceful and demure smile. “It's merely an unruly bunch and only their leader is slightly troublesome. Although I might reveal my identity as a result, it wouldn't be a problem since you have already agreed.

“Please don’t worry. Whether it is today or in the future, this bunch will not have the opportunity to do harm to you. I will let you acknowledge me.

“It is my honor to help resolve your problems.”

Upon hearing what Doris said, Lin Jie felt that if he were to reject her, it would practically be the same as if he was looking down on this waning clan that already needed external help to restore their significance.

It was seemingly a clan that still retained some of its pride and tremendous power despite them being on the decline.

Haa... I can't let this young miss think that I'm looking down on her.

After some slight pondering, Lin Jie answered, “If that’s the case, please be safe.”

“I understand. Please wait for a moment,” said Doris with a dazzling smile. She then left the counter and headed towards the door with a staunch look in her eyes.

She knew that this was a test and prerequisites.

The bookstore owner had mentioned “Not a problem” earlier. This meant that as a blessed one, he could seek Lady Silver’s advice and let the glory of the Iris Flower emerge once again.

Following that, he had mentioned “It looks like I have new customers again”. However, those outside were undoubtedly enemies.

Therefore, from the turn of events, it was clear that the bookstore owner’s request was for her to get rid of these people as a show of her resolve towards restoring the honor of the Iris Clan.

Doris completely understood the bookstore owner’s wish.

She took a deep breath and set her sights on the source of white light in the distance.

The glaring white lights weren't just outside the bookstore. Its actual source was in fact several kilometers away.

However, that terrifying amount of aetheric energy brought about such an unimaginable amount of heat that it became something that could be seen with the naked eye.

It couldn't be sensed from within the peaceful bookstore, but the rain and floodwater outside had already entirely evaporated. A thick mist had already formed within a one-kilometer radius as thunder and lightning flashed while the howling wind raged.

Droplets of water condensed on the windows of the bookstore and were vibrating along with the subtle trembling of the ground.

The Destructive-rank "Flame Enchantment – Polarizing Death Ray" was just extraordinary.

Once released, this whole area would be completely obliterated. Black magicians were indeed a bunch of lunatics and thugs.

Even Doris felt that this was a rather thorny situation.

However, the completely unfazed bookstore owner made her truly realize the gulf in their levels. He was much more powerful than what she could imagine...

She absolutely had to pass this test!

Doris' blueish-jade eyes glowed in golden light and the iridescence became the shape of an iris flower.

She reached for the door handle and lightly pushed the door open.

Chapter 48 Prophet

Chapter 48: Prophet

At this moment, the scenario outside was totally different from Lin Jie's imagination.

But if one were to think about it from a different aspect, there were actually some semblances.

In the distance, several kilometers away from the bookstore, a massive white curse array was revolving in midair. At its center, a ball of pure white light warped and distorted rapidly as a terrifying energy accumulated.

Forks of lightning flickered through the dark clouds as the rising vapor formed a vacuum.

Buildings in the surroundings had already been leveled by the overflow of aether. A ring of debris formed a 'low wall' around the core that was continuously enlarging.

A woman in nun's robes floated in midair, hands clasped in prayer. Her expression was cold and only her lips moved as she chanted the curse.

Similarly, the Coffin of Eternal Rest was suspended in midair and its embedded gemstone glowed an eerie blood red.

The origin concept of the Coffin of Eternal Rest was 'Resurrection'. But at the same time, before 'Resurrection', there needed to be experiences of 'Death' and 'Pain' first. Thus, this sorcery tool was able to become a tool for such relevant incantations.

The chanting gradually calmed and the spell array eventually stabilized. Morpheus opened her eyes and smiled in satisfaction.

'Scarlet Cult' black magicians at the side waiting on her saw that she had stopped reciting.

One of them immediately stepped forward. “Madam Morphey, Secret Rite Tower personnel have already been alarmed and are rushing over. We are currently intercepting them but we will probably only be able to stop them for about ten minutes due to our lack of manpower.”

Morphey sneered as she glanced at the already completed spell array. With a casual wave of her hand, she remarked, “Polarizing Death Ray has already been completed. There’s no need for any further interception. Prepare to deliver the spell array.”

She was well-versed with the might of Polarizing Death Ray. Even Wilde at his peak would suffer serious injuries if he were struck by it at such a close distance.

There was no way the other party would escape unscathed unless he was a Supreme-rank. However, of all the known Supreme-rank entities, none of them could be in Norzin.

What Morphey wanted to do was to give a thorough warning to this person—Stop interfering.

Although this Polarizing Death Ray had more or less drained around 80% of the aetheric energy that Morphey was able to utilize, she believed that the effect would be worth it.

A simple warning in the first place didn’t require such an excessive operation.

But the episode back at their headquarters where Morphey was caught off guard by Wilde’s counter-spell in front of her subordinates had left her fuming and wanting to teach this fella a lesson he would never forget.

The impression outsiders had of black magicians was indeed correct.

Black magicians were all a bunch of loonies, time bombs that only retained just the tiniest bit of rationality.

Thus, she at least remembered to move away after completing her spell preparations.

The black magician at her side nodded. “Yes.”

Then, he exchanged glances with the other black magicians and they combined their strength to activate the teleportation array.

A light blue teleportation gate started to open slowly in the sky.

At the same time, the black magicians saw the distorting white core of ‘Polarizing Death Ray’ in the distance finally reached the limits and became a spot of pure blackness.

Aether concentrated to its extremes was shot out and formed a pure white beam of power, akin to a blade piercing through the dark clouds.

Rumble!

As if a knife cutting through hot butter, the beam sliced through the thick fog pervading the atmosphere, creating a vacuum.

Just by watching, Scarlet Cult black magicians felt shock, awe, and fear.

This was the true might of a high-level black magician.

Worthy of being Destructive-rank!

Madam Morpheus is really too powerful!

Many of these subordinates felt lucky at being able to witness a Destructive-rank black magician take action.

Most of the black magicians had already entered the teleportation array and their eyes were excitedly trained at their target.

The bookstore.

In the blink of an eye, the ‘Polarizing Death Ray’ was just several hundred meters away from the bookstore.

The mass of terrifying aetheric energy was barreling down on the doors of the bookstore.

Just a little more and they would witness the place being razed to the ground.

Jingle.

Crisp jingles of the hanging doorbell sounded as the bookstore's door was opened.

Hmm? Finally about to fight back?

The attention of all the black magician's including Morphey's was attracted over.

Prior to this, there hadn't only been a simple aether barrier but also no other activity which made them assume that the bookstore owner had given up completely.

The door was opened, then closed back very quickly, as if afraid that the people inside would be disturbed.

The one stepping out wasn't the bookstore owner depicted in their investigation resources, but rather, an elf in an elegant white gown.

Beautiful, graceful, sharp ears, and perfect features.

In total correspondence with the image people had of elves.

An elf?

Morphey was stunned. Her eyes narrowed as her mind struggled to think.

Why is it an elf? Why is it an elf?!

Doris reached out and did a grasping motion as a wooden branch-like scepter sprouted from the palm of her hands. Atop the scepter was a snow-white iris flower.

Iris flower?

Morphey recalled the iris flower that had blossomed on the flesh before withering which had taken away Uri's and Johann's lives.

She suddenly had a foreboding sense of dread.

The elf stepped forward and faced the piercing ray of light.

Baam!

Doris stuck the wooden scepter deep into the muddied ground and cracks appeared all around its incision. "Forest Refuge Boundary!" muttered Doris.

Rumble!

Countless roots emerged from the ground, extending into giant sturdy branches in the direction of Polarizing Death Ray and collided with it.

Loud crackling could be heard as the mass of trees was destroyed by the blazing beam of aether bit by bit.

However, more trees were growing continuously, forming a massive half-circle boundary that consumed the beam at the same time.

The two forces were evenly matched!

'Prophet' Doris was a Destructive-rank sage of the Iris Clan.

In the instant of impact, a massive explosion erupted. Everything besides the epicenter was instantly obliterated. Buildings fell like dominoes and a large crater formed in the ground as the huge amount of aether was rapidly consumed.

Doris' face paled but her grip on her clan's scepter got tighter as it wore on.

She pulled up the scepter bit by bit, yet the boundary formed by trees kept getting quicker. The spell array where the Polarizing Death Ray had been conjured gradually disappeared like an oil painting being wiped clean. Eventually, it became unable to support the spell and the ray gradually became weaker.

Doris then plucked out the scepter from the ground and held it with both hands. The wooden scepter then transformed into a bow.

Her eyes had now turned completely golden. Like an expert hunter, she drew the bowstring, accumulating aether into an arrow which she then let fly.

In an instant, it had traversed a distance of several kilometers and arrived at the area where Morphey and the others were.

Whoosh!

“Not good, get out!”

“Her target is the teleportation gate!”

Several black magicians shouted but the arrow had already arrived.

Morphey’s face fell.

The tables had been turned.

Chapter 49 Were You Disturbed?

Chapter 49: Were You Disturbed?

“Her target is the teleportation gate!”

“Quick! Get out!”

Those black magicians whose bodies were only partially through the teleportation gate shouted out in panic.

Doris proclaimed loudly, “My arrow will sever all escape paths of enemies!”

The golden arrow was like a comet hurtling towards the ground as its velocity reached the limits. Just like how the Polarizing Death Ray had cut a swath through the sky, the current situation was now a complete reversal.

The teleportation gate formed from the aether was just like a light-blue membrane, joining together two different spaces on both its ends.

The teleportation gate conjured by the combined strength of more than ten black magicians was sufficient to support their retreat. At the same time, this gate was both stable and wide, two characteristics that were the pride of Scarlet Cult’s black magicians.

However, at this moment, no matter how sturdy the teleportation gate was, it was no match against a Destructive-rank attack.

This wide pathway had become an actual death trap.

A portion of black magicians with fast reactions managed to successfully leave the light-blue teleportation gate, but there were those who slightly lagged behind.

This bit was the difference between life and death.

Whoosh—Boom!

The arrow struck the edge of the teleportation gate and the membrane-like blue light was torn apart. Following that, the space-time within the portal became unstable and started to fold.

Just like paper going through a shredding machine, those caught inside were ripped apart as even their innards were all squeezed out.

The teleportation gate had become an aetheric meat grinder.

Eventually, the portal vanished as bits and pieces of flesh continued to rain down.

The remaining handful of black magicians stared in shock as their fellow comrades were ripped apart noiselessly.

This too, would have been their outcome if they had been any slower.

Morphey's face had also turned ugly.

Secret Rite Tower and the Truth Union personnel that were mobilized would reach soon.

However, losing the teleportation gate meant that they had lost their escape route. Now, Morphey was indeed stuck in an evenly-matched deadlock with that elf opposite her.

But she would have no way out if she was impeded till personnel from Secret Rite Tower and the Truth Union arrived.

"There's no other choice. You forced me into this!" Morphey's gaze darkened.

Behind her, the Coffin of Eternal Rest opened slowly as a sinister aura seemed to seep out from within the coffin.

"Become my nourishment."

From up high, Morphey ordered those black magicians.

The black magicians of Scarlet Sect first froze before a fanatical look appeared on their faces. “We are willing to serve you, Madam Morphey.”

The clash between Forest Refuge Boundary and Polarizing Death Ray was approaching its conclusion.

Ash and withered tree fragments rained down as the beam of pure white light got weaker and weaker. There wasn’t much aether left in the array and the entire spell had lost its impetus.

The thick fog and dew in the air once again turned into rainwater and started falling to the ground.

“Shriek—”

Accompanying this strange roar was a huge shadow that emerged from the coffin as it opened up. This huge shadow rose into the air and spread its 60-meter wings.

It was a monstrous bird over 20 meters tall with a layer of scales covering its half-decayed body and a head that was literally a skull with sharp teeth protruding out all over. It raised its neck and cried out to the heavens.

The stench of death emanated from its body as bits of decaying flesh fell off each time it moved. Rancid pus dripped down its body and corroded whatever it landed on.

This was a Destructive-rank dream beast that had died but was given a chance to live again within the Coffin of Eternal Rest—Traveler.

Raising a dream beast. This was the true use of Morphey’s Coffin of Eternal Rest.

She hadn’t thoroughly eradicated the dream beast after killing it. Instead, Morphey had kept it within the Coffin of Eternal Rest in an attempt to resurrect it and produce a dream beast that belonged to herself.

This was definitely a taboo that violated the Truth Union’s

regulations as well as the consensus for extraordinary beings.

“Shriek—”

Traveler unleashed a shrill cry, unfurled its wings, and took off to the skies.

Whoosh—

Like a gale of pestilence from the netherworld, the giant beast with a horizontal span close to 70 meters shot forward in a terrifying manner.

Atop Traveler, Morphey opened her arms and admired her masterpiece with a look of deranged ecstasy.

How is it? This magnificent object of the dream realm is a truly perfect creature!

After first killing that elf, Traveler would carry Morphey on its back and transcend the dream realm to her destination.

It was just unfortunate that this wasn't a complete resurrection and it would take a few months before Traveler would be restored to its former state.

Morphey turned her gaze to the ground beneath only to realize the elf revealed a gentle smile before raising the scepter in her hand.

“Summon, Night-gaunt!”

A dream realm fracture started to open before her.

As a family clan blessed by the Primordial Witch, Lady Silver, the members of the Iris Clan possessed the ability to seek out and open the dream realm.

The boundaries of reality and dream realm were also established by the Primordial Witches, so it wasn't surprising that the Iris Clan would have such abilities. Just that they wouldn't abuse such abilities under most circumstances because of how terrifying the dream realm was.

During the chaos of the teleportation gate's destruction, Doris had taken that opportunity for a short bout of foresight.

As a prophet, she generally had two styles of foresight.

The first was 'Predictive', forecasting important periods in the future. The signs received in most cases would be in the form of a 'prophecy', just like the one Doris had spoken to Ji Zhixiu about.

The second style was 'Perceptive', which was a short term prediction. This sort of foresight had a high degree of accuracy but its effective period was very short and mostly suitable to be used in combat.

Of course, a prophet needed to have extraordinary reactive ability, if not, they could just be killed in an instant even if they were to see the 'Perceptive' signs.

Doris had clearly foreseen Traveler being summoned.

The Iris Clan under the protection of a witch would naturally have a much higher level of knowledge than any ordinary black magician.

And naturally, even Morpheus didn't know this either but the seemingly all-powerful Traveler had a mortal enemy that it feared.

Night-gaunt.

Lin Jie brewed and poured himself another cup of tea with the water he just boiled.

He observed the floating tea leaves on the surface, then glanced outside, feeling a little worried.

However, the fog on top of the dusky weather outside made it hard for him to see anything clearly.

Lin Jie wondered if they were a little further away as all sound seemed to be smothered by and there was only the indistinct sound of rain.

“At least the headlights have been turned off. It seems like the talks were effective.” Lin Jie nodded his head.

The young miss’ confidence came from her own strength. She had just been gone for a bit and those glaring head beams had been shut.

But after awhile, Lin Jie suddenly felt the floor shaking slightly.

An earthquake?

Lin Jie eyed the cup in his hand suspiciously, then stood up with a raised eyebrow intending to step out to check on the situation. At this moment, the vibrations stopped.

Jingle .

The bookstore’s door was opened once again.

Doris entered with a slightly weary expression.

She shut the door, leaned back against the door frame, and stealthily dispelled the Silence Boundary she had set up before heading out. Then, she looked towards Lin Jie and the hot tea on the counter before smiling.

“Although I did take quite some time, the matter was still resolved rather smoothly. Were you disturbed by anything? We can continue on from where we left off.”

Chapter 50 Elder Sign

Chapter 50: Elder Sign

Lin Jie relaxed a little when he noticed that besides looking slightly pale and tired, Doris seemed to be alright.

Shaking his head, he said, “Nope. The heavy rain completely drowned out all your voices.”

Doris’ heart skipped a beat.

Her Silence Boundary had isolated external sounds and her Forest Refuge Boundary had practically blocked all damage.

The surrounding hundred-meter radius around the bookstore was completely unscathed.

It was clearly because of the boundaries... Wait a minute.

Doris felt as though there was some implicit meaning behind these words.

Does rain... mean something else?

Although Doris didn’t comprehend it yet, she could understand that Norzin was currently caught in a troubled situation based on the words of that young hunter.

This bunch of maniacal black magicians validated that point.

Whether it was hunters, magicians, Secret Rite Tower, or the Truth Union, a massive vortex had formed and those involved were caught up inside.

Even a fight between two Destructive-ranks was merely a splash within this vortex.

In a flash, their voices had been completely drowned out till nothing was left.

Was this the scope of an actual high-level being?

Doris walked over and sat down. She no longer dared to guess what role this bookstore owner had played in this ‘rain’.

Even if he wasn’t the key player, this bookstore owner had certainly played an influential role in having a Destructive-rank black magician come knocking without a care in the world.

Just that Doris didn’t know whether this influence was positive or negative...

For now, Doris kept her guard up and put on a slight smile. “Uh, I’m glad you weren’t disturbed. They will never bother you anymore.”

Lin Jie also couldn’t help casually mentioning about the current weather in Norzin. “The current situation in Norzin has been bad, but I’m seeing much more customers recently. Oh, don’t get me wrong. I’m not rejoicing about this weather getting worse and worse.

“Although I’ve seen more customers recently, I actually also liked those days where I had fewer customers and could do stuff like basking in the sun when I got bored as well as do some reading most of the time.”

He glanced at dark streets outside and smiled brightly. “I believe that with everyone’s collective effort and united will, the situation will definitely change for the better in the future.”

The smile on Doris’ face froze.

Everyone’s collective effort... Did he mean the brazen ‘Polarizing Death Ray’, a Destructive-rank spell that nearly razed everything to the ground... effort?

Moreover, ‘living a retiree’s life basking in the sun and reading occasionally’. Clearly that sounds extremely dull and boring, alright?!

Now that I think of it, doesn’t this all sound like irony...

So the current situation was deliberately created because you felt you had too few customers and being only able to read books was boring?

Lady Silver, this dependent of yours doesn't seem to have a very good character.

Lin Jie noticed the customer's facial expression getting worse and his heart dropped.

How could he have forgotten that this young miss was surely tired after having braved the heavy winds and rains to get rid of those unsavory visitors?

Yet, he, the beneficiary of help, was still yakking away about collective effort and whatnot. Did he even want to retain this cash co... no, customer?

Alas, I have blundered.

Right now, what this young miss needs is warmth and concern.

He pulled his gaze away and pushed a cup of tea across the table. "Let's move on to something else. You've gone through quite a lot of trouble to resolve the matter. Have some tea and rest up first."

"...Mhmm." Doris took the cup with a slightly more caution.

After all, the blessed one before her could decide the fate of the Iris Clan. Moreover, it seemed like he was rather temperamental, enjoyed toying with people and provoking fights without getting bored of it.

Her eyes shifted to the cup and she gazed at the floating tea leaves within it with some hesitation.

Ever since tea leaves were brought in from the North, drinking tea had already become a common tradition within Norzin. However, most of it was drunk as black tea with sugar and milk added. There were rarely any people that just brewed roasted tea leaves this way.

Doris hadn't come in contact with the outside world for a long time and was rather unfamiliar with these kinds of human stuff.

Her ‘renting an apartment’ was actually just her knocking the owner unconscious.

She carefully took a sip and found the taste very peculiar. Bitter with a hint of fragrance, yet this sort of naturalness was seemingly very compatible with elves.

On top of that, the warmth of the hot tea was indeed very comforting.

Doris smiled joyfully and exhaled. She put down her cup while being deep in thought. The bookstore owner had been completely unfazed by the Destructive-rank battle outside and had even brewed tea...

He hadn’t just brewed a cup for himself and had incidentally brewed another cup for Doris as well.

It seemed like the bookstore owner was already certain of the victor before it even began. Just that he had given Doris a necessary task to observe her performance.

Given his current manner, it seemed like the bookstore owner was somewhat satisfied.

Doris composed herself and asked, “Can we continue on with the topic we left off?”

Lin Jie nodded and answered resolutely, “Yes, I can help with your problem but it won’t be easy. Gaining recognition once more will be a long and arduous process. I will try my best but what is most important is how you all correspond.”

For all that the young lady before him had said, Lin Jie deduced that she was from a noble family called the Iris Clan.

On top of that, this was a family clan that once had a glorious history.

Just that due to certain misfortunes, the true significance of the family’s crest was lost, possibly along with the clan’s historical annals. Over time, other noble families gradually stopped

acknowledging them and the clan declined.

Restoration and filling the gaps of history was a rather large undertaking. Moreover, those of the clan themselves couldn't spill the beans or have a substandard understanding of this knowledge. Otherwise, there would be no end to trouble.

This young lady had come seeking him because of her trust in Ji Zhixiu. Naturally, Lin Jie would have to produce the goods.

He, Lin Jie might be untalented, but he at least had a slight knowledge of heraldry.

Since heraldry studies back in his own country were basically unheard of, Lin Jie managed to get authorization from the Academic Heraldry Association through a friend and published a book *Emblems & Totems* which could be sold in a series along with his other book *Ceremonies & Customs* .

[T/L Note: Totems in this case are Chinese totem tattoos which are like symbols]

Lin Jie drew out that book from the shelf behind him and handed it over to the young elf lady.

“Read this carefully first, it will definitely come in helpful. Regaining glory isn't an easy matter.”

Doris' heart was thumping as she took the book.

Her eyes were immediately drawn to the strange symbol on the cover.

A distorted five-pointed star that seemed to stare straight into her eyes from its center point and overflowing with a hallowed overtone.

The book's title — *Elder Sign* .

Chapter 51 Sellers Disposition

Chapter 51: Seller's Disposition

Doris couldn't stop herself from staring obsessively at this queer yet strangely beautiful symbol.

It seemed to possess some sort of magic that was hallowed and bizarre.

Using her high degree of insight from being a prophet as well as her abundant knowledge, Doris discerned the affiliated significance of this symbol.

'Seal', 'Oppose', 'Dream Realm', 'Refuge', 'Retreat'...

This symbol apparently targeted... dream realm organisms.

Lin Jie flashed an especially warm smile at the thought of his new service. "This book can help you all better understand what I'll need to do. Things would get a lot easier if you all are able to remember it and I wouldn't have to spend too much effort."

He would prepare some relevant material for them first. This would save a lot of trouble in the future as Lin Jie wouldn't have to explain and guide them over every single step.

Although Teacher Lin was friendly and warmhearted, he couldn't waste his time on meaningless matters. After all, time was money.

It just so happened that he had produced such a relevant book in the past.

Compared to proper academic books about emblems, Lin Jie's ***Emblems & Totems*** was simpler yet heterogeneous because it touched on totemism, clans, and even the occult.

However, it was also suitable for professionals in this field as well as novices. So much so that this was the best selling book amongst all of Lin Jie's works.

Doris seemed to jolt awake when she heard what was said and placed the book on the counter. After which she took several deep breaths, grasped the book, and nodded. "I understand. I will definitely study your work meticulously."

She had a calm face on but her heart was anything but calm.

Doris was aware that she had just nearly entered a 'Predictive' state.

This was irrational for a prophet and even went against common sense.

Prophets had two foresight styles. 'Predictive' and 'Perceptive' were the two extremes of the spectrum.

'Perceptive' was a short-term burst of insight that results in a rapid forecast of the next few hours or even a few seconds and it got more difficult the shorter the time frame.

On the other hand, 'Predictive' was a forecast of a longer period in the future. Under most circumstances, a prophet would need to start preparing for a long time and the prediction would get more difficult the longer the time gap.

In any case, all types of foresight were very difficult.

The small number of prophets wasn't without reason. It was because the innate skill requirements were just too high.

Without innate skill and just relying purely on hard work was basically impossible unless one was a being with longevity like elves. Someone without innate skill can spend an entire lifespan learning yet wouldn't even be able to foresee his death at the time he dies.

Previously, to get clues of Lady Silver, Doris had spent tens of hours before finally gaining such a simple and vague prophecy.

Although a partial reason was that the subject involved was such a high-level entity, there was no doubting how difficult it was for a prophet to forecast the future.

But now, Doris had nearly entered her 'Predictive' state in just a short time and without any preparation.

Doris was rather certain that it was because of this book laid out before her...

It was able to trigger Doris' insight and that meant its level of mysticism far surpassed Doris herself. As a result, Doris was able to have a short-term gain in insight just by looking straight at it.

The power contained within this small symbol was already very frightening. Who could know what sort of vast and mysterious pictures the contents within the book could paint?

Doris couldn't help sneaking a glance at the shelf packed full of books that stood behind Lin Jie.

She hadn't paid it any heed at first, but now that the bookstore owner had casually pulled out a book from there, Doris now viewed them as mysterious and powerful books.

All the books in this bookstore really weren't as simple as they looked.

Lin Jie cleared his throat and the dazed Doris regained her senses and looked over.

With a serious expression, Lin Jie began, "As this is a matter that involves your entire clan, I would advise all of you to read up and learn the contents so that I wouldn't have to expend too much effort when 'saving all of you from danger'. You must know that recently, I have many people to help and might not have too much spare time."

He would be the last hope at saving the dignity and honor of a declining noble clan.

Therefore, saying that he was saving them from danger was no exaggeration.

Moreover... Adding a slight sense of crisis would allow the customer before him to understand how pressing the matter was.

It isn't pressing for just you, I feel the same too. This is your last chance!

This was akin to the 'change of season clearance sales', 'limited price slashes', and 'last pair in stock' frequently seen in retail stores.

Any seller should at least learn how to make up a story.

He too didn't know why so many people sought him out for help even though he clearly had very few customers.

Doris indeed got anxious but she did her best not to reveal any panic and immediately answered calmly, "Since there is a marked price, there should be many copies of this book, right? I can purchase them for my clan members to study. Please don't worry. We will definitely memorize it as quickly as possible."

As for why this book was published in a batch and even had a marked price was something she didn't need to put into consideration.

A great being would have a great being's preferences...

From the start, what she needed to do was satisfy this bookstore owner to the best of her abilities.

Then, strive to gain recognition from Lady Silver.

Lin Jie gave a mental thumbs-up to this savvy guest, then took a cardboard box from beneath the counter and started filling it with copies of **Emblems & Totems** , four or five at a time.

The arrangement on the bookshelf appeared entirely according to Lin Jie's thoughts. This was also in favor with the bookstore's dim lighting.

So, even if the other party found anything strange, she would most likely assume that her eyes were playing tricks on her.

Doris' pupils contracted as she witnessed everything but didn't say a thing. Inwardly, she told herself that the bookstore must be a sorcery tool with a related space-time function.

“There are only 30 copies currently. I’ll just pack them all up for you.”

Baam!

Lin Jie placed the cardboard box on the counter-top.

No matter how dim the lighting was, even a fool would realize something amiss if a hundred books were taken down from the shelves.

This was why Lin Jie had only taken out 30 copies and employed a hunger marketing strategy.

Doris nodded her head respectfully. “Thank you for your guidance towards our clan. If our glory can be restored, the Iris Clan is willing to serve you faithfully.”

At this moment, several hundred meters away from the bookstore where the remnants of the recent battle had been...

Currently, Secret Rite Tower and the Truth Union personnel were going through the kilometer-wide radius of destruction, searching for clues and bodies.

Some personnel were also dispatched to carry out follow-up measures to houses in the vicinity whose inhabitants weren’t involved but had witnessed this battle.

Wiping their memory, for example.

“Section Chief, Mr. Andrew of the Truth Union says that they are currently carrying out a magic assessment and asks you to not wander around by yourself to prevent damaging the remaining aetheric vestiges...”

Joseph waved his hands in annoyance. “Assessment my *ss!”

He pointed to a pile of rubble by the side and said, “This is the result of the Truth Union’s Aetheric Surveillance Network, allowing

a Destructive-rank black magician to do as she pleases. What a big joke!”

Naturally, the Truth Union personnel heard his unbridled ridicule, but the temperament of this former Radiant Knight was well-known and thus, they could only hold in their anger.

“Umm...” The intelligence branch underling wiped beads of sweat off his forehead before continuing, “The target of those black magicians was that bookstore. Should we go and investigate it?”

Joseph turned his head around at once and muttered in a low voice, “Do not go!”

“But, the Truth Union seems to...”

“Make them come back!”

Chapter 52 In Front Of My Masters Door

Chapter 52: In Front of My Master's Door

George Byron, 24. A young scholar of the Truth Union, adept in alchemy and having a high level of mastery in magical assessment and aetheric traces.

As a recognized level two Truth Union alchemist, he could create tools that could defend against or even kill Destructive-rank entities.

Even though he had great investigative abilities, most of the time, he was usually employed as logistical staff responsible for providing combat personnel with appropriate equipment.

But due to the recent spate of events where combat was prevalent, the Truth Union was overwhelmed.

The Truth Union didn't lack logistical support, but lacked investigation personnel that were useful on the battlefield. Moreover, the large majority of their staff were civilians and simply had no wish to engage in battles.

Thus, Byron had been urgently dispatched to oversee the on-site investigations in the aftermath of this incident.

It was described as an incident, but this was entirely an act of terrorism.

"These black magicians are really a bunch of lunatics to actually invoke a Destructive-rank spell here! And there wasn't any response from the Aetheric Surveillance Network..." muttered Byron with wide eyes atop the rubble.

With a frown, he gazed at the surrounding ruins by the heavy rain.

The horrible circumstances weren't just limited to destruction, death, and injuries. What was even more alarming was the failure of the Truth Union's monitoring and forecast systems.

This meant that either the black magicians had a way to bypass the Aetheric Surveillance Network, or there were moles in the Truth Union.

Byron jotted down his conjecture in his notebook.

The deceased are Scarlet Cult leader 'Precant' Morphey and several other black magicians. Offensive means used by both parties are as follows...

All of the attacks were clearly targeted at the bookstore on 23rd Avenue. However, Scarlet Sect had previously always been in conflict with Secret Rite Tower as well as hunters. Why did they suddenly come here... Who exactly is in the bookstore?

Byron wandered over the rubble and casted his gaze at that bookstore.

The boundary they had established covered the surroundings and was currently altering the memories of all the people within the area. Only the bookstore wasn't affected.

Compared to the surrounding ruins, the middle of the street seemed to have become a huge chasm, separating two sides.

One side was the complete demolished district while the other seemed perfectly fine and as peaceful as ever.

The attack of Scarlet Cult's black magicians had been completely blocked by someone who had forcefully counter attacked and wiped them out.

The opposing side also had someone who possessed Destructive-rank ability or higher.

The Truth Union didn't know who the bookstore owner was and it signified that it could be a being that could prove uncontrollable.

"I'll head to the bookstore and check it out," Byron instructed a colleague at the side before jumping off the rubble and started towards the bookstore. That ordinary bookstore was just opposite the street. Through the fog, Byron could make out an indistinct and dusky glow from the windows.

It was as if a strange magic was enticing him to go over and find out exactly what was inside the bookstore.

He kept on walking and was almost upon the door.

Pa! A hand landed on Byron's shoulder.

"Stop." A gruff, solemn voice sounded.

Byron turned around and saw an aged but tall and muscular man. He frowned and asked, "Mr. Joseph, is anything the matter?"

The former knight rebutted with a question of his own. "What are you going to do?"

Byron answered matter-of-factly, "Investigating that dubious bookstore."

He held up his notebook and went out. "My responsibility is to get to the bottom of this matter and that bookstore is clearly one of the parties involved. I need to get the truth for the Truth Union."

Joseph growled, "For the sake of your rationality, do not go."

"Knowledge allows me to stay cool-headed and rationality is a quality that every scholar must have," replied Byron. "I would never waver and what you are doing is an insult towards my dignity."

"Even if you are a Destructive-rank knight and a respected senior, it doesn't give you the right to make fun of my rationality."

"Moreover, this is my responsibility."

Joseph often felt frustrated dealing with these blocks of wood from the Truth Union. He understood that without any actual evidence, it

was impossible to sway these wooden blocks once they firmly believed something was the case.

However, the one before him was no simple fella. He could construct Destructive-rank equipment and had already reached a level where he could be called a ‘master’.

Many of the refined equipment used by Secret Rite Tower were purchased in bulk from the Truth Union.

Perhaps, a large number of these tools were made by Byron.

“Secret Rite Tower has already classified this bookstore as an S-rank Zone, just that this information hasn’t been passed on to the Truth Union’s database. The bookstore owner has helped us this time, so you mustn’t be unable to differentiate good from bad.”

Joseph then eyed the bookstore and added, “I think the bookstore owner wouldn’t like you going to interrogate him.”

Byron’s status in the Truth Union was sufficient for him to access confidential files.

His pupils narrowed. “S-Rank? In Norzin?” he exclaimed in disbelief.

It was natural for him to be in disbelief. In Norzin, the Truth Union’s reach was basically all-pervasive so how could there have been an S-Rank zone right under their noses?

Even though S-Ranks were powerful, the Truth Union’s aetheric network had been established by a mighty Supreme-rank entity. Theoretically speaking, nothing should have been able to slip through that net.

“What’s wrong? Seems fake to you?” Joseph’s lips twitched. “Just some time ago, a Destructive-rank black magician unleashed a Destructive-rank spell but that whatever network your Truth Union has didn’t even react at all. In the end, it was the bookstore owner who stopped them quicker than Secret Rite Tower’s response.”

“This... This...” Byron stuttered, not knowing what to say.

Joseph scoffed. “You all ought to thoroughly investigate yourselves first.”

At this moment, there was a jingle of a bell as the wooden door of the bookstore opened.

The two men immediately glanced over and saw that it was a beautiful elf in a white dress that stepped out from the bookstore.

Both men were momentarily stunned. Byron reacted this way because he never imagined an elf would appear from the bookstore whereas Joseph’s mind went blank because of the flash of understanding.

When he had borrowed ***Seed of the Abyss*** , Joseph guessed that the bookstore owner was a being with longevity, with a high possibility of him being an elf.

It now seemed like this guess had finally turned out right.

Elves were an extremely haughty and xenophobic race and it was practically impossible to see them together with humans.

It could even be said that they were natural-born racists.

Tales of love between human and elf were all just but stories.

Besides having especially pure blood, the elf also glanced at the bookstore with a look of reverence after exiting it!

At this moment, Joseph obtained the answer for the final doubts he had in his heart. It was about time he returned the book... And the demon sword probably found its new owner.

That elf turned around and looked towards them before smiling brightly. “Humans, what are you all doing in front of my master’s door?”

Chapter 53 Hunting Wilde

Chapter 53: Hunting Wilde

Byron stared at the approaching elf and muttered, “Lord?”

He was utterly shocked.

From his knowledge of history, those capable of having elves worship them were probably only those four Primordial Witches.

But it couldn't be that a Primordial Witch had descended from the dream realm and was in the bookstore just across the street.

“The blessed emissary of my lord has the right to represent my lord's will.”

Doris turned towards Byron and flashed a beaming smile. “Seems like the Truth Union is getting less sensible by the day. Was it my master's kindness that let you all have such ignorant courage, or has too much curiosity already muddled your brains, giving you the audacity to pry at what my master does?”

Byron had on a set of easily identified scholar robes with the Truth Union insignia emblazoned on.

He was no stranger to the kind of wording and tone used by this elf. This was how a staunch believer whose everything was for their ‘lord’ was.

It wasn't just restricted to the Church of the Dome and other official religions. Even within the Truth Union, there were also some who would get fanatical when talking about the greatness of knowledge.

A tremendous aether dazzling like a torch exuded from the elf opposite them and she didn't conceal her dangerous aura at all.

It allowed Byron to sober up from his disoriented state and he was able to restrain his overwhelming curiosity. After being stunned for

a few moments, he realized his back was riddled with cold sweat.

What was I thinking?

Ignoring Mr. Joseph's advice, having a dispute with him and trying to butt into a place classified as an S-Rank zone by Secret Rite Tower. My curiosity would have gotten me killed even if I had multiple lives.

Right now, Byron was bewildered and experienced a lingering fear. He swore to himself that he hadn't wanted to do so originally.

Even though he was the one in-charge dispatched over by the Truth Union, he didn't really have much combat ability and was purely responsible to make a record.

For a fight between Destructive-ranks, the one who ought to lead the investigations also ought to be a Destructive-rank. Moreover, Joseph, a former Great Radiant Knight had been right there.

Byron didn't know why he hadn't been able to think properly...

He eyed the quaint little bookstore then bowed. "No, no, no. I'm terribly sorry. Please forgive me. I was just trying to fulfill my duty to fully investigate the matter and make a report. That's all there is to it. I'm sure your benevolent lord wouldn't bother with an ignorant seeker of knowledge like me."

He had come to the realization that this elf had been the one involved in that battle.

Since that was the case, just having a simple understanding of the incident was enough.

As for that bookstore... It was too dangerous!

Doris returned a smile. "You ought to rejoice."

She walked over to the two men and said, "Due to certain reasons, these black magicians suddenly tried to use the Destructive-rank spell 'Polarizing Death Ray' on the bookstore and its surroundings. I stepped forward to halt it and killed them. That's all there is to it."

Joseph took a step forward and stood in front of Byron. “What do you think the reason for their actions was?”

In his heart, he was already adding on the information he knew about the bookstore owner.

From the looks of this matter, Scarlet Cult’s black magicians had simultaneously launched three attacks targeted at existences that would prove huge obstacles to their operations. It could also be considered a large-scale counterattack.

And this battle was one amongst those three.

In the past month, the joint investigations between Secret Rite Tower and the Truth Union had led to many secret hideouts of Scarlet Cult and White Wolf being busted.

Their hiding spots were increasingly being diminished yet the place where the Magic Ovum Mirror was hidden hadn’t been exposed yet.

On one hand, it was because of their prudent operations. They would immediately retreat through a teleportation gate each time they were successful and never lingered. Even if any members were caught, they would basically kill themselves on the spot.

Even though Scarlet Cult wasn’t really a cult, the style in which they operated was as if they were all maniacal zealots.

The other aspect of this was because ‘Precant’ Morpheus’s Coffin of Eternal Rest continuously resurrected their members.

These resurrected puppets were numerous and while they were weaker than the original, they still served as great hindrances to investigations.

Yet another of their attacks was targeted at ‘Spider’, a branch of hunters that had broken off from White Wolves.

Due to the loss of ‘Rat’ Ruen’s information network as well as ‘Spider’ consisting of members familiar with the White Wolf organization, White Wolf incurred heavy losses and were nearly destroyed before they fully cooperated with Scarlet Cult.

The last remaining attack was against Secret Rite Tower and the Truth Union whom they were in daily conflict with everyday, just that it was more ferocious this time around.

Anyone with a brain could easily guess that all this craziness was because the incubation of the Magic Ovum Mirror was in its final stages.

Yet, unexpectedly, an issue had occurred not within the lower rungs, but at the top of the hierarchy.

The top leader, 'Precant' Morpheus had been killed in what should have been an easy and straightforward battle.

For the looks of things, the bookstore owner must have done something terrible to Scarlet Cult for him to be targeted.

And now, he had gotten himself an underling to just get rid of the Scarlet Sect's head.

This is the bookstore owner choosing to stand on our side! Joseph thought to himself.

Doris' beautiful smile didn't dissipate at all. She could see that the knight before her was trying to protect the young man behind him.

She tilted her head and frowned slightly, "How would I know? Shouldn't I be asking you instead? I arrived in Norzin representing the Iris Clan only to see my lord's emissary on the receiving end of an inexplicable attack by those thugs. Was I supposed to sit idly and not strike back?"

"Moreover, I just helped you people stop these thugs, yet instead of being grateful, you bunch are trying to interrogate me in such an overbearing manner. Is this how Norzin treats its visitors?"

Joseph slightly loosened his mechanical limb and nodded. "I admit that our handling of this incident has been inadequate. Actually, I respect this bookstore owner greatly and I'm very grateful to him. He once lent me a book that helped solve troubles that were with me for a long time. If it weren't for the inconvenient circumstances today, I would have definitely paid him a visit now."

Byron chimed in hurriedly, “Since the matter has already been cleared up, we can return to submit our report. The Truth Union expresses our thanks for the contributions you have made to Norzin.”

The communications device on his body sounded almost immediately after he had spoken.

Byron picked it up and his pupils narrowed when he saw the display. He immediately imbued aether to put the call through and took a deep breath. “Vice-chairman, sir.”

“Um, Byron, hand the communications device to the great sage of the Iris Clan.”

Byron held it carefully and looked towards Doris who took it over gleefully.

The voice on the other end sounded old but forceful. “Doris, it’s been 300 years. I hope you are well?”

“Andrew?”

Norzin Central District, Truth Union General Office.

The white marble building had a refined design and sleek floorboards that even seemed to shine. The interior was spacious with sofas, seats, coffee tables, whiteboards, and numerous discussion zones flanking the open-air courtyard in the central point of the building.

This complex 13-story building was like a huge combination between a school building and a library.

The skeleton of an ancient dragon was encased in glass within the central openwork courtyard, serving as a display for people to marvel at.

At this moment, the luxuriously furnished office on the topmost floor was like an activity center for the elderly. Two old men were

seated facing each other with a chessboard on the coffee table between them.

“Never imagined that the Iris Clan would reappear.” One of the old men mused as he glanced at Truth Union Vice-chairman Andrew who had walked out to the balcony to make a call. “An old crush reappearing all of a sudden but a pity that dashing youth is now an old fogey.”

“Watch out or your Alchemy funding will get cut.” The other old man teased under his breath as he reached out to move a chess piece. “Wilde’s bounty has been accepted by someone. Yet another huge sum will be paid out and you can just wait for that messy research project of yours to be shelved.”

Chapter 54 Let Him Be Our Eyes

Chapter 54: Let Him Be Our Eyes

The ‘bounty’ set by the Truth Union was something known by everyone.

It had been two whole years yet nobody had really taken on this bounty.

Firstly, it was the duty of Secret Rite Tower’s knights to root out evil and keep the peace. Also, most people didn’t have a need for such superfluous justice.

Secondly, even if the black magician Wilde had been grievously hurt, he was still a Destructive-rank after all.

A crippled Destructive-rank was still a force to reckon with.

Even a half-dead Destructive-rank could still slay Pandemonium-ranks with just a twitch of the lips as long as he could still harness the aether.

Nobody beneath Destructive-rank strength would dare take on this bullet.

And would any Destructive-ranks be in need of money?

They were all great beings, and would any need to do the job personally should they want to kill someone?

Thirdly, a failure would harm their own reputation, so the gains wouldn’t make up for the losses.

On top of that, even Joseph, Wilde’s greatest foe hadn’t even taken up this bounty, so why should most people join in the excitement?

To top it off, Wilde’s whereabouts were still unknown till now.

There was no way of verifying whether he was still alive without any accurate information.

Previously, there had been some rumors that Wilde was within Norzin, but there hadn't been any follow-up since.

Accepting this job meant spending a great deal of effort to first find the missing Wilde which was a tough task itself.

With these lines of reasoning, Wilde's bounty being taken on for the first time in two years wasn't out of the ordinary.

Walter Leonard, the Truth Union's Head of Alchemy rebutted disgruntledly when he heard what was said. "If mine is a messy research project, then your mechanics department is just absolutely useless. All you do is research stuff like 'fully-automated hair washers' or a 'dual-purpose muffler glove'. In my opinion, the vice-chairman should cut your expenses."

Following that, he asked with a weird look on his face, "Was there really someone who took on Wilde's bounty? I wonder which great Destructive-rank is bored or has too much time on his hands."

Leonard then noticed something on the chessboard and said triumphantly, "My dear Feige, I suspect that you used this to divert my attention so that you could cheat your way to victory."

Head of Mechanics Department, Rowell Feige slapped the table and exclaimed in a high-pitched voice. "Hey, do I look like such a person?"

"You don't look like one." Leonard shook his head. He then shifted one of his chess pieces and said confidently, "You are one!"

Feige sighed, "Even though you have accused me wrongly, I still treat you as my best friend."

Leonard sneered, "Anyone can be a friend of the cunning, merciless, and greedy Feige when money is involved."

Feige shook his head. "You have grossly misjudged me. However, I have to say this, all of my research is useful. The 'Clay Idol' plan is

reaching its final stages. We are able to proceed with the final step once we obtain the philosopher's stone.

"And it's all thanks to Lady Doris' help. The philosopher's stone from the Coffin of Eternal Rest is much better than the ones you alchemy masters produce."

Leonard shot the other old man a mystified look. Tugging his ear, he said mockingly, "I've heard the phrase 'Proceed with the final step' many times but after each time, a certain someone would clutch a failure report and continue requesting funding for experiments. Sometimes, I really wonder whether it is all a big fraud to get more funds."

"It's because you people provide us with inadequate philosopher's stones!"

"Don't try giving excuses. Clearly, your department's skills are lacking!"

The two old men glared at each other for a moment, then humphed at the same time and returned their eyes back to the chessboard.

After a while, Leonard couldn't help speaking up. "You haven't told me who exactly took on the bounty?"

Even though he could just use the Truth Union's internal network to do a search, he would feel that using such 'external help' was a little shameful.

"Ha," Feige let out a strange laugh, pleased that the Head of Alchemy Department had been the first to speak. "I just knew that you wouldn't be able to guess it. The one who took on the bounty this time isn't any Destructive-rank but a Pandemonium-rank hunter instead."

"A hunter? Pandemonium-rank?" Leonard raised an eyebrow. "Are you kidding me?"

His line of thoughts immediately changed.

No, if the Truth Union could permit this person to take on the

bounty, it meant that he or she would indeed have at least a 50% probability of completing the mission.

But if this hunter was only a Pandemonium-rank, then the answer was clear—

“Destructive-rank advancement accreditation?”

Someone wanting to advance in rank on the Truth Union’s yearly list required proving oneself with deeds.

For example, someone defeating a Destructive-rank in a battle would be evaluated as a new Destructive-rank.

Those that didn’t fight all the time could also go through a standard aether test, just that they would have a ‘standardized test’ indication behind their names. Somehow, it would make them seem a step lower than others, so most people would usually gain their accreditations through battle deeds.

“That’s right,” said Feige with a nod. “Pandemonium-rank hunter, ‘Pale Night-watcher’ Burton Ackerman has suggested taking Wilde’s bounty to prove himself.

“During the standardization test, he was able to display Destructive-rank strength after injecting himself with sordid blood. Thus, we approved his application.”

Leonard nodded his head. “I see, but can he really find...”

“What are you two talking about?” Andrew suddenly walked in and interrupted the conversation between these two. He sat down on the couch beside them and tossed his communications device away.

The Truth Union vice-chairman sighed, “I never imagined this...”

“Vice-chair, what’s wrong?” Leonard asked.

Andrew had a complicated look in his eyes as he lamented, “300 years have passed. I’ve aged considerably yet she’s still exactly the same and even her manner of speech hasn’t changed one bit. It makes me feel as if I’m in a dream.”

Leonard thought to himself that this was probably melancholy from seeing an old crush once again.

Elves like Doris are beings with longevity after all. What's there to lament about?

However, it would be better if he didn't say it aloud for the sake of his funding.

Feige asked, "Vice-chair, what exactly is going on with that bookstore? Has the Iris Clan really proclaimed him as their lord?"

"Not him, but the entity behind him. Secret Rite Tower has already sent over their case file. Check it out yourselves."

Andrew's brows creased as he said this with a veiled loathing in his eyes. "I also never imagined that there would be an unnoticed Supreme-rank in Norzin. But the file was personally written by Joseph and we have to treat it with importance... Since his stance is friendly, we can choose to feel him out slowly. However, such an entity being in Norzin would ultimately be troublesome."

"So, you are saying?" asked Leonard.

"We wait and see." Andrew stood up and said calmly, "Wilde and this bookstore owner have some connection. Guide Ackerman over and let him be our eyes."

Chapter 55 Doris Seed

Chapter 55: Doris' Seed

Feige and Leonard exchanged glances.

After a moment's hesitation, it was Leonard who spoke up. "Feeling out whether a Supreme-rank entity is overly dangerous requires greater prudence."

Feige nodded in agreement. "Moreover, what's most important currently is to resolve the Magic Ovum Mirror. Now that Morphey is dead, Scarlet Cult would be in scattered disarray. Remaining White Wolf remnants would find it difficult to continue and now would be the best time to pursue them."

"Firstly, Secret Rite Tower and Joseph's report are that it was Morphey who first made her move and Doris counterattacked. Till now, the bookstore has never voluntarily shown any aggression.

"And through Scarlet Cult's offensive, we are able to at least determine that the bookstore isn't on their side. It's just a pity that Doris didn't leave any survivors, otherwise we would be able to get a better picture of this Scarlet Cult operation.

"The matter of the Magic Ovum Mirror is of top priority. Therefore, getting Ackerman to feel out the bookstore is a good choice, even though I have to admit that we are making use of him."

Andrew chimed in, "We have to determine the bookstore owner's modus-operandi and approximate intent. This isn't something that can be just described as 'friendly'. We must be responsible for the millions of citizens in Norzin.

"This incident has to make us reflect on ourselves and what exactly were we doing."

He gazed out to the gloomy curtain of rain beyond the balcony, as if staring at something beyond the thick clouds. "Our Truth Union's

importance isn't just to seek truth, but to maintain order. But when an organization becomes an authority and gains excessive power, corruption would stem from within."

Feige and Leonard's hearts skipped a beat, as if vaguely realizing something.

Andrew's hands clutch the balcony railing as he gazed at skeletal remains in the middle courtyard. "The failure of our surveillance network is unquestionable, leading to Scarlet Cult and White Wolf being able to avoid detection. However, the question is... where is the problem?"

The two others immediately stood up.

What the vice-chairman meant was— *Were there spies within the Truth Union?!*

Andrew sobered up and said with a penetrating gaze, "The public's trust in the Truth Union will take a massive beating if we do not handle this matter well and we might not be able to bear the consequences."

"This is a list of staff who have interacted with the Aether Network within the month, from when the Magic Ovum Mirror appeared. I believe in your characters and the two of you men I trust most, yet distanced from the command core. Now, the Truth Union lacks a self-monitoring structure and I hope the two of you can help."

Leonard and Feige took the list from Andrew with slight shock and hesitance.

"Don't worry, this is also Chairman Maria's intention as well."

Andrew then added, "She has already signed off on this list. If it weren't because she's trying to break through to Supreme-rank, she would be the one authorizing you two herself and there would already have been proper preparation of this plan."

As the other two browsed through the list, they discovered that Chairman Maria's stamp of authorization was on it. These aetheric traces couldn't be forged.

“That will be it, we first get Ackerman to investigate and if need be, we don’t fear a Supreme-rank,” Andrew went on. “After all, even a god will die one day. Only the truth is everlasting.”

If Secret Rite Tower’s evaluation had been ‘hostile’ instead of ‘friendly’, it wouldn’t be an investigation, but rather, a mobilization of full force power to wipe the bookstore off the face of Norzin.

The power of individuals was a thing of the past. Although the number of Destructive-ranked beings in Norzin could be counted, if it really became a fight, even a Supreme-rank would have to consider the Truth Union’s Aether Annihilation Cannon. That alone could cause great harm to a Supreme-rank entity.

The reason why Scarlet Cult and White Wolf had been able to hide for so long was because they could run very well and also because the Truth Union had been weak...

Under uncertain conditions, the Truth Union was incapable of employing highly destructive weapons and could only rely on the aetheric network and manpower to capture criminals.

Now that the Aetheric Network had been tampered with, the circumstances were now dicey.

Originally, the Truth Union had planned to use a space disturbance technique to retain the black magicians when Morphey had appeared. However, the appearance of Doris had made them halt and observe the fight.

The other two men kept the list away and repeated, “Only the truth is everlasting.”

“Reporting live from the scene. A gas explosion occurred on 21st to 23rd Avenue last night. There were numerous casualties and the financial damages are estimated to be in the millions.

“According to experts, this was a result of a combination of harsh weather, factories’ lack of supervision and being in a state of disrepair. Thus, a chain of explosions occurred and the fire spread

rapidly. Also, the flooding followed caused buildings to collapse...

“Fortunately, our fire control and rescue teams arrived on scene and carried out rescue operations promptly. On top of that, the heavy rain also hampered the spread and the blazes were finally halted before 23rd Avenue. As you can see, the road has become a clear divider. On the left are perfectly undamaged houses while the right side is in ruins.

Lin Jie heard the next door neighbor’s television broadcasting this news when he came down early in the morning to open shop.

He froze for a moment. *23rd Avenue... Isn’t it this street?*

He opened the door and through the rain, made out many machines in operation, bright lights flashing and indistinct shouts from people. The scene across the road was indeed in ruins.

There were also a bunch of bystanders watching the scene from the side.

Lin Jie even saw the news reporter that was currently going about the news story.

“How did an explosion suddenly occur while I was sleeping?”

Lin Jie frowned, he must have slept really well for him to remain undisturbed when a gas explosion happened across the street.

Besides entertaining the young elf lady Doris and selling 30 books in a single sitting as well as her chasing away a group whom Lin Jie suspected were coming to do a check on unlicensed shops, nothing else had happened yesterday.

The night had been peaceful, yet today morning, there was news that a gas explosion had occurred just opposite him.

Life could really be magical at times.

“Fortunately it stopped across the road. Otherwise, my transmigration journey might have just ended right here,” muttered Lin Jie to himself as he shook his head.

Then, Lin Jie recalled what he had said about ‘everyone’s collective effort and united will, the situation will definitely change for the better in the future’. To think that such a calamity occurred the next day.

Could I be a... jinx?

Lin Jie coughed twice and casually closed the door as if nothing happened and returned back.

Jinxes are merely superstition. No way, no way...

He returned back to his seat at the counter, turned on the lights and the heater, and sat a kettle to boil for brewing tea. The only thing different from his routine was Lin Jie specifically watering a potted plant placed on the counter.

While Lin Jie called it a potted plant, it actually seemed to be a pot of soil.

Before Doris left yesterday, she had given Lin Jie a seed.

According to her, it was probably rather precious and had its own thoughts, desires, and other mystical whatnot that fascinated young girls.

Lin Jie thought that purifying the air of the bookstore wasn’t a bad idea. Thus, he had found an old pot and planted the seed in it. He too, had no idea how long it would take for the seed to sprout.

Lin Jie patted the pot and said earnestly, “If you really have your own thoughts, then grow into something beautiful.”

Chapter 56 Go Ahead And Look Around

Chapter 56: Go Ahead and Look Around

“Is this it?”

Ackerman raised his head in the rain, looking at the bookstore ahead.

Raindrops splattered down on the hood over his head and flowed down his raincoat turning into puddles on the ground.

The scene was exactly what was described in the Truth Union’s report—an ordinary bookstore that looked slightly rundown and didn’t even have a signboard.

If not from being able to see rows and rows of books through the beautiful windows, Ackerman wouldn’t have thought this to be a bookstore.

This isn’t very business-minded... Or does this bookstore owner not consider selling books at all?

As if he’s specially maintaining the cheerlessness of the store. With these thoughts in mind, Ackerman became even more skeptical. He closed his eyes, capturing the minute bits of aether in the rain and relied on his extraordinary sense of smell to analyze.

Traces of Wilde’s aetheric aura did exist within this bookstore and it was even clearer here than other places he had been rumored to have been.

Although it had already been concealed very well, it still couldn’t get past Ackerman’s nose.

There was a sense of danger. Not too strong, as if it was a certain amalgamation of creature and soul. Using it to guard the door was

indeed quite a good choice.

However, using it to ward off an extraordinary being at Ackerman's level was simply impossible.

The Truth Union's report stated that Wilde had been to this bookstore twice and stayed for over an hour each time. However, from what he currently saw, Ackerman felt that this bookstore probably wasn't an important stronghold but rather a hidden relay station, possibly for information, or perhaps for remarkable goods.

Many people had come here bringing some items, and also leaving with some items.

Various messy aetheric vestiges in the air painted a complicated picture.

Amongst them, the traces formed by Wilde's aura was even more obvious and frequent than most others.

Although these traces were sparse, it seemed like he was a frequent customer of this bookstore.

Ackerman opened his eyes.

If this is the case, Wilde would definitely return again.

This consideration was probably the reason as to why the Truth Union had chosen not to act rashly and inadvertently alarm them.

There would be an opportunity to capture Wilde as long as he returned.

However, due to the disturbance caused by Scarlet Cult and White Wolf, the Truth Union had been busy trying to capture these bunch of rats. "But to think of it, the matter should probably be concluding soon," muttered Ackerman as he gazed at the street and buildings behind him that were still in the process of reconstruction. It had been a week since that battle passed, but reconstruction was even more difficult than it originally was due to the unpleasant weather conditions.

Therefore, it had been easier to move the fortunate surviving residents to other districts while temporarily shelving aside reconstruction plans after tidying up this area.

The scattered aether fragments still remained within the air, just like smoke after a battle. Even though the battle had already ended, there was still the smell of smoke and blood remaining.

Secret Rite Tower and the Truth Union were really proficient at covering up this sort of matters.

Morphey's death basically meant that Scarlet Cult and White Wolf now lost their greatest support in both power and confidence.

"Tsk tsk, that really was trying to court a disaster. I hope that she realized what went wrong before she died," said Ackerman as his lips curled into a snide smile.

Even though the great sage that came to visit the Truth Union was considered to be Morphey's demise, their eventual loss would have been a matter of time even if Doris hadn't appeared.

"Does the Magic Ovum Mirror... really so powerful that it can tempt a person's soul to the point of losing rationality?" Ackerman shook his head and turned back. This was something he didn't wish to try.

Right now, his mission was to wait for an opportunity and afterwards achieve his own Destructive-rank evaluation.

He was a hunter, and the most important characteristics a hunter needed were caution and patience.

Ackerman didn't enter the bookstore yet and instead did a detailed investigation of the surroundings.

There had been many noisy people coming over to check out the scene due to the recent so-called 'gas explosion', so wandering around the area wouldn't seem out of the ordinary.

He went around sensing the aetheric traces around the bookstore but only found just a few. This made him feel that his actions here

were superfluous.

After all, even if he really entered the bookstore, all he could do now was pretend to be an ordinary customer and carry out only the most basic investigations.

Eventually, Ackerman shook his raincoat, walked up to the door with the 'open' sign, and pushed it open.

The bell jingled.

Water droplets fell onto the floorboards forming puddles as the bookstore's interior greeted his eyes.

There was nothing noteworthy besides the stone gargoyle on the counter that had clear aether fluctuations originating from Wilde. Its glimmering blood-red eyes seemed especially deterring.

However, from his experience, Ackerman knew that this type of construct would only attack in response to killing intent or if ordered to do so by its owner.

Ackerman would definitely be safe as long as he didn't show any killing intent or malice.

He had absolute confidence in his own disguise. Even if someone of a similar level were present, they wouldn't realize anything amiss till just before Ackerman made a move.

Ackerman walked in slowly and hung his raincoat on the umbrella rack. He had already raised his vigilance to the highest level and controlled every single inch of muscle in his body so as to not reveal the slightest bit of flaw as he casually surveyed the surroundings.

The young man at the counter looked up and asked out of routine, "Welcome! Would you be borrowing, reading, or buying books?"

Right now, Ackerman was playing the role of an ordinary working-class adult. Thus, he casually replied, "Just looking around."

Indeed, he was just any ordinary person who had come to see the

extent of the accident and then casually wandering into the bookstore at the side.

Such a person would have no motives and wouldn't need to make any choices.

Ackerman walked over to the counter while thinking to himself that this bookstore owner seemed like an ordinary person.

Could this place be like a warehouse of sorts and the bookstore owner is just a disposable tool that can be randomly replaced by any other ordinary being?

Ackerman's gaze did a quick sweep of the counter-top.

In this dusky and monotonous bookstore, the only thing of color on the counter-top was a potted plant.

It was a red rose that was in the midst of blooming. Light was reflected in water droplets on the rose and it was a rather pretty view.

This was the genuine bright spot in the dark, gloomy bookstore.

But it was merely an ordinary rose.

Ackerman decided to walk around and casually go about his first round of investigation.

At that moment, the rosebud wobbled slightly and an eyeball popped out in the middle of its bud. With some fluids still dripping from it, the eyeball rotated slightly and stared straight at Ackerman.

Ackerman froze and every inch of his body became numb. He immediately wanted to back away but realized that he had been totally immobilized.

He couldn't help meeting the gaze of that eyeball and felt as if his soul was being trapped and devoured by something.

A trap?!

How... is this possible?!

I didn't sense anything! There wasn't even any fluctuation in the aether!

The young man behind the counter flashed an amicable smile and said, "Go ahead and look around. You can look for me if you have any questions."

Chapter 57 Malicious Intentions

Chapter 57: Malicious Intentions

What am I to look at! How can I look around? I can't even move!

Ackerman's pupils were trembling, a sign of his internal struggle.

He saw the bookstore owner's warm, amicable smile and seemed to sense deep-rooted ridicule and malice.

The bookstore owner was viewing him as if he was a helpless marionette caught in a trap. The more the owner watched, the more enthusiastic he got.

This fellow has definitely seen through my disguise a long time ago!

Ackerman had reckoned that the bookstore owner was oblivious when he had smartly pretended to be an ordinary customer and said he was "just looking around".

This bookstore owner had snidely replied with "Go ahead and look around."

This meant that he wanted to see the fear and helplessness in this trespasser's eyes. The meaning couldn't be anymore implicit— *This had been an unadorned threat!*

Didn't you wish to just look around? Go ahead and look. I shan't stop you. You can't move?

Sorry, this is merely my pet unintentionally acting up.

Ackerman had never experienced such humiliation before.

He could easily be killed, yet this bookstore owner had an ulterior motive!

But unfortunately for Ackerman, it was helpless no matter how much he struggled to even move a muscle.

The veins on his temple were bulging and his eyes were entirely bloodshot. It could be said that he was using every ounce of strength in his entire body.

He swore that if it were under normal circumstances, the current strength he was using was enough to pound the bookstore's entire neighborhood to dust in a single punch.

However, on the outside, the current scene appeared like him frozen in place, staring at that rose without moving the slightest.

He was being constricted by a formless power and simply had no way of budging.

Even more terrifying was that Ackerman felt himself 'wasting away'.

Whatever he had within his soul was currently being ravenously 'devoured' by the rose's eyeball.

To put it in an analogy, Ackerman felt as if he was a jelly dessert, firm in its plastic case at first. But now, the cover had been torn off and he was being sucked out.

This was an abstract sensation, but it was absolutely bone-chilling. Worse still, Ackerman couldn't stop it nor could he hold on to what was being absorbed away.

Thus, he finally understood that it wasn't the aether or any formless power that was preventing him from moving. Therefore, his strength hadn't decreased, nor had he experienced any resistance.

What was stopping him in his tracks was a power that was in a sense, spiritual.

The rose's 'eye' was telling him this—"Don't move!" And thus, he really stopped moving.

What the hell is that thing?

Ackerman was terrified. When gazing at that rose, his emotions had gone from rage to fear, before turning into utter helplessness. In this short span of a minute, Ackerman understood the meaning of absolute despair.

He couldn't imagine that he would stay in this state till he died...

The physique of a Destructive-rank hunter would only allow him to survive for three months without food and water. By the time he actually died, Ackerman felt that he would only be relieved at being freed.

This bookstore owner is definitely a demon that loves to toy with people's hearts!

Ackerman wailed soundlessly in his heart.

Lin Jie was in good spirits today.

The seed which he planted had sprouted into an especially beautiful red rose after seven days.

Flowering after just several days didn't seem right. Moreover, roses grew into bushes yet the seed had grown into a singular stalk which was indeed strange. However, the elf lady had said it was a precious specimen, so it was natural for it to have its own special characteristics.

Nowadays, many people took to growing plants and shrubs as a hobby but it could be difficult to ensure these plants grow well. This type of flower grew quickly and was easy to cultivate which could be a selling point.

Moreover, no one had said this was a rose. Perhaps it could be another species that just looked a little similar.

The second reason for Lin Jie's mood boost was a new customer.

There hadn't been any visits from the regulars in the past few days nor had there been any new customers.

It was as if the bookstore had returned back to its old desolate self

from before.

Although leisurely days like this weren't bad either, who wouldn't want to have a bunch of people to dole out chicken soup to and occasionally earn money?

However, even though a whole bunch of people had been attracted to the area because of the gas explosion incident, Lin Jie's bookstore still remained as its cold, lifeless self.

Even the next-door audio store was seeing much more business, yet there hadn't been a single customer on sight here.

This made Lin Jie start to wonder whether he should move forward with his bookstore's renovations.

In actuality, he had always been battling for these renovations.

However...

A lack of renovations would make the store incapable of attracting customers. This lack of business would mean he couldn't make money to pay for renovations.

This was a vicious cycle!

Alas, but isn't it fine because yet any customer has come now?

As long as he could develop this relationship, the money would be there for the taking.

Lin Jie happily welcomed this new customer and maintained his usual enthusiastic attitude that was like a warm spring day.

Even if the customer said he was just looking around or if he didn't have any desire to purchase anything, Lin Jie needed to think of a way to instigate him.

As Lin Jie was racking his brains, he suddenly discovered that this customer who was just looking around had actually stopped beside the counter for quite some time.

Slightly curious, he looked over and asked, “Hi, is something on your mind? Weren’t you just looking around?”

The customer didn’t reply and his gaze was still fixed firmly on the counter-top.

Lin Jie followed the customer’s gaze and found him looking at his potted rose.

Lin Jie was enlightened and reached out to pull the flower over to himself, which was the best lit spot in the bookstore. Chuckling, he asked, “Do you also think that I have a very beautiful plant?”

He had specially tilted the plant to face outwards so that customers could see this beautiful sight better.

His bookstore was a little shabby to look at, but thinking about it differently, if a place like this had such a beautiful flower, the effect would definitely be even more startling than a luxuriant place.

Looks like my efforts haven’t gone to waste!

Rumble...

As the pot was shifted, Ackerman’s stare-down with the eyeball was suddenly broken.

The moment he was released, Ackerman exhaled sharply and shuddered. Then, his eyes widened and his face turned pale when he saw that the flower was now just in front of the bookstore owner. The eyeball on the flower rotated several times before retreating back into the flower petals.

Due to the adequate lighting, Ackerman was able to see inside the flower bud at the moment the eyeball retracted in. In that split moment, he had seen a bunch of squirming and densely packed eyeballs...

Ackerman even wondered whether he was hallucinating from injecting himself with too much sordid blood. However, when he looked up and saw the bookstore owner’s warm smile, he knew that it wasn’t a delusion but actual hell.

Ackerman took a deep breath and replied, “Beautiful, it’s really beautiful...”

All of a sudden, he no longer wanted to achieve his Destructive-rank evaluation, nor did he have the urge to find Wilde anymore. His desires and ambition had disappeared. All he wanted right now was to sink into a couch and contemplate the meaning of life.

Chapter 58 Unraveling People

Chapter 58: Unraveling People

Lin Jie smiled when he saw the customer express admiration for his rose. “Thank you for your appreciation. I’m sure it would also be delightful.”

Everything had a soul. Respecting plants and flowers was a form of romanticism in life.

Moreover, the young elf lady had specially said that it also had thoughts. Even if he was just playing along to that young lady’s girlish heart, he still had to act like a mysterious seller.

—So that should a day come when the young elf lady returned and saw how her gift and kind intentions were valued, she would feel appreciated... And perhaps he would have one more to his customer base?

See, the path of earning money had to be built over a period of time.

‘The smallest of details can determine success and failure’ was a very true saying.

Moreover, Lin Jie had personally cared for this rose. Over the last week, he had watered it day by day and that had built up some sentiments.

“...” Upon hearing what was said, Ackerman felt a chill inside his body when he recalled the scene he had just witnessed.

Not only does this bookstore owner like toying with people’s hearts, he even seems so intimate with this ‘flower’... It’s as if he treats that monster as his own child.

Even black magician Morpheus who violated many taboos had at most only adored the resurrected dream beast as a wonderful

creation, yet she wouldn't go as far as to treat this sort of disgusting monster as a human!

What exactly is this bookstore owner?

Ackerman's eyelids twitched as he suddenly came to a reasonable guess.

Perhaps, the bookstore owner isn't human too?

What if he and the 'rose' were of the same species, just that he has on a layer of 'human' skin? Doesn't that make a lot of sense?

Why had Ackerman not been able to sense any aetheric aura? Why did this bookstore owner have such a vile and twisted character? Why was he unreasonably powerful... It was because the one standing before Ackerman was simply some sort of a higher life form.

But, did the Truth Union not know?

The damned Truth Union had used him as a cannon fodder!

Wilde had the capability of using this place as a hub but Ackerman felt like he was sent here as an offering!

"Heh...heheh..."

Ackerman laughed sheepishly, thinking to himself that the bookstore owner had been pleased by the praise for his 'flower'. Thus, he said the opposite of what he really felt. "I was just speaking the truth."

Lin Jie noticed his new customer's expression turning pale and thus shifted the pot to the side. "You seem a little unwell, how about taking a seat first?"

Goddamn it, the bookstore owner seems to have realized something amiss.

Ackerman shook his head hurriedly. "No, no, no. I'm totally fine..."

Lin Jie frowned. “Really? Don’t force yourself.”

He thought that this customer always put on a strong front. Even if he was weary and on the verge of collapsing, he would never show any sign of weakness to an outsider.

From his appearance, this new customer seemed to be a typical working-class adult somewhere in the 30s and 50s.

A working-class adult at this age would probably have both the elderly and the young to care for, a wife at home, and a boss at work. It wouldn’t be uncommon to have a sense of crisis as they approached middle age while still reluctant to part with their youth. This was a period in life that could be extremely stressful.

Moreover, this customer was seemingly a busybody that had come to see the scene of the explosion, yet without any particular purpose, he could be feeling at a loss.

Surely, this was a customer extremely in need of some guidance.

Thus, Lin Jie put on a kind smile and said, “Don’t worry, sit down. There’s nobody else here so you wouldn’t be seen by others. There’s no harm in telling me about any unhappy matters you might be facing. I’m quite good at unraveling people.”

Un...unraveling people?!

Ackerman’s entire body stiffened and he felt that something terrible would happen if he didn’t sit down.

Was there any other matter that made him upset?

Of course it was the matter of him wanting to figure out this bookstore yet being ambushed instead...

But could he say this? Of course not!

Wouldn’t he be completely unraveled if he confesses all this?

Are you unhappy? Then let me open up your heart (physically) — The bookstore owner’s implied meaning couldn’t be any clearer.

In the face of an even more unadorned threat, Ackerman could only nod his head in humiliation and hesitantly sit on the only other stool in the bookstore.

Lin Jie knew that he had already succeeded in the first step as he watched the customer hesitantly take a seat. However, having a customer with this sort of personality divulge his innermost thoughts would be a rather difficult task.

He would have to take the initiative and probe, as if prying open the hard shell of an oyster bit by bit to reveal the soft inner bits.

Lin Jie folded his arms and revealed his usual professional smile. "It's alright if you don't wish to talk about it. Let me guess, it's regarding your self-improvement, am I right?"

'Self-improvement'... was just like 'have you encountered some trouble'. Both were the specialty phrases of Lin Jie's.

As long as one wasn't suffering from depression, any ordinary person would definitely seek some form of self-improvement of varying degrees.

Many would call themselves names like 'trash', 'useless', or 'worthless bums', but in reality, some hope, no matter how tiny it was, would still exist in their hearts.

Even those with delusions of grandeur would also wish to improve in certain aspects to make their dreams come true, be it learning a new skill, or raising their standards.

Even changing a small flaw, figuring out something, or just solving a question could also be considered as self-improvement.

And when envisaged in deeper detail, the scale of self-improvement could be limitless.

This customer was clearly at a loss and his entire bearing was archetypal of someone currently caught in a predicament.

This phrase was a spot-on remedy and Lin Jie didn't believe that it would be ineffective.

Ackerman's pupils contracted and his breathing got heavier. He knows that I'm currently trying for a Destructive-rank evaluation?

No, it would be strange if he didn't know...

If it's this way, he probably knows that I have taken up Wilde's bounty with the intention of setting up an ambush here.

Ackerman didn't know what the bookstore owner's exact motive was.

Ackerman could have died countless times over during the entire minute of his stare-down with the 'flower' if the bookstore owner wished to kill him.

However, the bookstore owner hadn't made any moves and instead started chatting Ackerman up as if there was some other intention.

"I have already given up." Ackerman decided to speak the truth.

"They were merely using me and treating me as a disposable tool. I have only now seen through it. This sort of structure sounds fair, but in reality, the high and mighty still look down on people like us."

His tone was full of self-mocking.

In the end, black magicians, the Truth Union scholars, and other extraordinary beings all looked down on hunters that borrowed the power of dream beasts.

It is our own will that tames the sordid blood!

Lin Jie nodded while apparently in deep thought.

Ah, I see. It's pressure from superiors after all...

This customer was seeking a promotion or salary raise, yet he was frequently pushed around by his superiors, resulting in a weary outlook from knowing his place in society. After drifting around at a loss, he eventually wandered into the bookstore.

All probably thanks to fate.

Lin Jie gazed at this customer. “Have you thought of seeking a different way forward?”

Chapter 59 Brand New Venture

Chapter 59: Brand New Venture

A different path forward?

Ackerman gazed at the bookstore owner's profound expression and was momentarily stunned. What... what did this mean?

Lin Jie folded his arms as he explained. "Are you still willing to let them make use of you like this since you already know they merely view you as a tool? Perhaps you aren't provided with many benefits, yet they request a great deal from you without according you with the equivalent respect."

A complicated expression appeared on Ackerman's face as he listened to these enticing words—He wasn't willing of course.

The Truth Union's attitude towards hunters disappointed him.

However, he had always known the low status of hunters in the eyes of other extraordinary beings; because the power of hunters was borrowed, and they were often unstable and lacking rationality.

In their final throes of madness, some powerful hunters would assimilate with the sordid blood within the blood-stream and become new dream beasts that brought about great destruction.

Thus, to the Truth Union and Secret Rite Tower, each hunter was but an opportunistic gamble that could turn into an enemy at any moment.

It was only natural that they weren't viewed too kindly.

When it came to advancing in the Truth Union's evaluation, hunters had to go through a few additional steps. For example, a rationality assessment.

Ackerman knew that he couldn't blame the Truth Union for such discriminatory treatment because this was just the way hunters

were, he himself included.

The sordid blood Ackerman used came from ‘Pale One’ and the amount he injected had long passed the tolerable threshold.

After arousing the power within his blood-stream, Ackerman would become just like a white skeletal giant with tentacles and bone sticking out of his back as well as a huge cavity in the middle of his chest. When that happened, he was basically no different from the actual ‘Pale One’.

Ackerman was basically one of those so-called veteran hunters. His wits were on the verge of crumbling all the time and his willpower had become extremely frail.

He could only continuously apply the powerful depressant drugs sold by the Truth Union to maintain his own sanity.

However, he was still proud to be a hunter.

They didn’t have the mental fortitude of knights, the passed-down teachings of magicians, nor the intellect of scholars. Hunters were merely ordinary beings with flesh bodies that could draw out savage beasts through their blood and soul to use as their weapon.

But even a hunter like Ackerman whose strength had basically reached Destructive-rank wasn’t accorded the necessary respect by the Truth Union and was just viewed as nothing more than a disposable tool.

“I...I’ve never thought that there were other choices.” Ackerman clenched his fists as he struggled to keep the internal contradictions in check. “They’ve always controlled everything, and fighting for my own standing requires having to go through them.”

Ahh, so it’s a company in a monopoly system. It’s probably a huge one from the sound of things.

Maybe it’s a company similar to Rolle Resource Development that Ji Zhixiu’s father owns. Perhaps the expertise and skill set of this customer are limited to this domain and he has no way but to act accordingly to the set rules and regulations.

Ahh, now the circumstances seem much more troubling indeed.

This isn't just an issue with the company but with his own ambitions as well.

Either he chooses to toll away in a huge corporation and let his superiors walk all over him, or slightly lower his aspirations and move on to a smaller firm, or completely give up on his ambitions and take a leap of faith and change his career... Right, this doesn't seem too plausible.

Without the resolution to go for broke and leave or if his working environment is simply horrendous, such a decision might not be really worth it.

But since the customer across Lin Jie had mentioned he hadn't thought of other alternatives, it meant that deep down, he could accept some big changes, just that his heart was being gripped by some uncertainty or fear.

After some thought, Lin Jie asked, "Then, do you really think that they are the authority? Would you be completely unable to exist once you leave them? Does having your own niche really require you to go through them?"

"Think about your current situation, think about your future possible situation, then think about the situation of people like you. You would then know that I'm not saying words to scare you, neither am I trying to instigate you. I just hope that you would be able to make a choice true to yourself."

Ackerman felt as if he had been struck by lightning as his entire body froze up.

It was a gloomy and downcast day, yet he felt as if a fire was blazing in his heart.

Despite his scorn and critique of the Truth Union, he had subconsciously made out the Truth Union to be an absolute authority.

But in reality, they simply didn't care about hunters. Perhaps, when

a hunter applied for an official evaluation, those in the Truth Union might be laughing themselves silly.

Hunters only needed the recognition of themselves and other hunters. Why should they be pushed around by others?

Only this way would hunters have a day where they could stand tall!

Even though the bookstore owner's identity and motives were still unclear, all that he said was enlightening.

Ackerman was stirred up and said, "I understand... What you are trying to say is that an exit is something I have to find on my own. We have to rely on ourselves."

Hmm? Has he made up his mind just like this?

Although this customer seems to be in a mid-life crisis, it looks like he still has an unyielding heart willing to give a final struggle and choose to venture out.

Lin Jie was somewhat surprised but the situation was still within his control.

He had reserves of chicken soup stored up to deal with all sorts of choices... That's right, everything up till now had been just a talk.

On deeper inspection, what Lin Jie had expressed were just some vague prompts based on the information he had.

How it was interpreted depended entirely on what the subject perceived.

Different people had different mind frames and naturally, different answers. The choices they made were their own and in reality, had nothing to do with Lin Jie.

In the end, they would credit his words, but what they perceived was their own desire.

Lin Jie blinked, then nodded his head while maintaining his calm

smile.

“Sometimes, a blind compromise might not give you the peaceful environment you seek and instead make you seem weak and easy to bully.

“Your strength might be insufficient to them but you aren’t alone. You still have comrades to join forces with— and perhaps attempt something brand new? Of course, everything is up to you. Think things over carefully and make sure you won’t regret.”

Ackerman seemingly saw the bookstore owner’s true intent when he heard this.

He’s inciting dissension between hunters and the Truth Union in a bid to make the Truth Union’s authority crumble!

Indeed, toying with people’s hearts and inciting strife. This is a demon’s entertainment.

However, these thoughts the demon was implanting into his head actually... excited him.

Ackerman didn’t know what of his that had been taken away by that ‘flower’. However, he vaguely felt that it was perhaps a portion of his desires.

Because, his greatest desire at the time when the bookstore owner interrupted had been to complete his Destructive-rank evaluation.

Now, he totally didn’t care about gaining the recognition of the Truth Union.

On the contrary, he now had a resolve to have no regrets and raise the banner belonging to hunters... It really was an undertaking that he now had a longing for.

Ackerman took a deep breath and said, “I know that it is very risky. However... I really want to do it. I must be crazy.”

Lin Jie chuckled, “I have a customer by the name of Ji Zhixiu. I’ll introduce you to her sometime and perhaps she could help you. ”

As the only daughter of Rolle Resource Development Company's boss, offering a job wouldn't be a tough request for young Miss Ji.

Chapter 60 Chessboard

Chapter 60: Chessboard of a Great Being

Even though Lin Jie was just lending some guidance to supplement this customer's own opinion, he felt that the notion to venture out was a good idea.

Since this customer was being trampled on in the company to the point he considered himself a disposable tool, it meant that the psychological damage he suffered was severe. Therefore, taking on a different path and getting out was a better choice.

However, a career switch for a middle-aged person was something rather difficult and couldn't just be achieved with purely determination but money and means as well.

Most importantly, this customer needed to have no worries for the future.

However, from how quickly he had made his decision and said he knew that it was "very risky", that meant that the customer probably had some confidence.

To ensure that this new customer didn't leave as quickly as he came, Lin Jie felt that it was best to have some insurance.

Fortunately, young Miss Ji should be able to help a bit. At the very least, it could ensure that this customer before Lin Jie wouldn't be unemployed.

Ji Zhixiu's father controlled Rolle Resource Development, an enormous corporation that basically monopolized all resources and minerals in the lower city district, as well as being involved in nearly all aspects of Norzin.

The corporation's influence in Norzin was unbelievable.

This was a corporation that was omnipresent in every industry.

Whether it was clothing, food, housing, transport, or any other trade, there would be the influence of this corporation as long as one was willing to do a little digging. At the very least, there hadn't been anything like this back on Earth.

Even though Lin Jie was an outsider who had only been in this world for three years, he had deeply experienced the influence of Rolle Resource Development.

Lin Jie would see the Rolle Resource Development's logo of a flight of descending stairs on at least half the stores whenever he went out to get food or groceries.

Even the CD and CD players sold in the audio store next door were manufactured by a company under the Rolle flag.

Perhaps, even the contents of these CDs were produced by artists in entertainment companies that Rolle Resource Development held a controlling stake in.

Lin Jie had once looked up Rolle Resource Development's history out of curiosity and discovered that the company had been established a very long time ago and that it had actually been an army that administered the lower district prior to its establishment.

Some of its history was complicated and many records were already unreliable at this time. The head of Rolle Resource Development had already gone through many generations of change and even those in their internal department might not have a full understanding.

All in all, how Rolle Resource Development became a monopoly was basically due to the structure of the entire Norzin.

Norzin's Upper District was an artificial city constructed out of metal and was completely separated from the ground.

When viewing from above, the Upper District was just like a humongous sphere.

Norzin's land area was about the size of a province in Ancient China. Streets close to the Central District had their own names

while the remaining roads and streets would be labeled with alphabets or numbers.

The 23rd Avenue where Lin Jie's bookstore was located was a numbered street that was still considered close to the Central District.

Then, there was the Lower District which referred to "below ground" and "ground transition zone".

From such a structure, it was obvious that the Upper District was basically artificial constructs where no natural resources existed.

The actual natural resources were entirely situated in the Lower District.

The Lower District was also where some inhabitants came into contact with the boundary of Azir—The Wall of Fog, and suffered from a strange plague and affected their descendants.

For thousands of years, isolation was enforced for these people, resulting in an entirely different ecology in the Lower District and above ground.

Incidentally, the Church of Pestilence originated from the Lower District and was still the principal faith there.

This led to a complete separation between the Lower District and the upper ones.

Thus, certain specialized organizations emerged within the districts to help the Upper District mine for resources.

Over time, competition and annexation occurred between these organizations which finally resulted in the formation of a huge corporation, Rolle Resource Development.

Now, only this company held the sole right to act independently and operate in the Lower District.

Other resource companies needed to obtain approval from the Central District before being able to head to the Lower District to

extract resources.

Of course, inhabitants of the Upper District could also apply to visit the Lower District, just that it requires many levels of approval as well as valid grounds for doing so.

Most of the time, those that went down were reporters or scholars and they needed to sign extremely complicated agreements before they started.

In any case, Rolle Resource Development was such a massive corporation and since Ji Zhixiu was the only daughter of the boss of this corporation and a lady of the upper class, it should be truly effortless for her to arrange a job.

“She should probably be able to help you out.”

Lin Jie noticed that the customer across him seemed to have some slight doubt that this affluent young lady was an acquaintance of his and thus explained, “She encountered some troubles not too long ago and my counsel was useful in helping her resolve the issue. The loan period for the book she borrowed is nearly up and I reckon she would come by to return it in a few days’ time.”

Ackerman’s pupils narrowed as he had a flash of understanding.

“No wonder.... No wonder,” he uttered.

This explained a lot!

Although he acted alone as a hunter, he had some understanding about the current state of Norzin.

The starting point of White Wolf’s hunters’ cooperation with Scarlet Cult’s black magicians had been when Heris’ ‘White Wolf’ was defeated by the Ji Zhixiu- led group ‘Spider’.

In the end, Heris had to kill the second leader, Kaji, and fled on his own.

Eventually, after consolidating his strength, Heris started working with Scarlet Cult.

However, the reason for White Wolf's fall was that Ji Zhixiu who was initially being pursued became much stronger all of a sudden.

This was a baffling riddle that many people couldn't solve. But now, Ackerman finally knew that it was because Ji Zhixiu had gotten help from the bookstore owner!

No wonder. And all this stuff he is telling me, could it mean... He wants the originally scattered and individualistic hunters to gather and form an organization that can rival the Truth Union and Secret Rite Tower?!

Haa, this would really be a prominent mark in the hunter history if it really is the case.

The entire structure of Norzin would also be changed!

Ackerman's heart was pounding. At the same time, he felt a deep sense of trepidation towards the bookstore owner as he couldn't help stopping himself from thinking that—

This is the chessboard of a great being! And I am fortunate to be just a little chess piece in his game...

However, some small doubt had crept into his heart. "Can I borrow a book?"

Ackerman cast a glance at the bookshelf.

Lin Jie's smile deepened.

Finally, after dupe... no, putting in effort for half the day, we are finally on the right subject.

"I was just about to mention it.

"Since you are inexperienced and it being your first time doing something like this, I foresee that you might encounter many troubles in the upcoming process... Here's a book that would be very useful. It will be best to read through this first."

Lin Jie fished out a book titled Zero-Cost Entrepreneurship from the

bookshelf behind him.

Chapter 61 Zero Cost Transaction

Chapter 61: Zero Cost Transaction

When Lin Jie turned around to retrieve the book, Ackerman's mind was spinning with thoughts.

Moments ago, the bookstore owner had said that Ji Zhixiu had borrowed a book and would be returning it soon.

Ji Zhixiu had also received guidance and gained strength from the bookstore owner to gain the upper hand in White Wolf's internal conflict.

By joining the dots, it was clear that the bookstore owner had imparted power and guidance to Ji Zhixiu through his book.

Ackerman shuddered as he eyed the many bookshelves all around him that were filled to the brim.

Were these...all books that contained the taboo?

Once again, he realized how ignorant and insignificant he was.

Such a huge book depository definitely contained unimaginable and terrifying power.

Ackerman had very cautiously investigated the bookstore and its surroundings but wasn't able to discover anything amiss. All this time, he had reckoned it was merely an ordinary bookstore.

This alone demonstrated that the bookstore owner was on a completely different level compared to him.

Ackerman hadn't been able to sense anything strange, yet the bookstore owner had taken control of him the moment he entered.

Ackerman subconsciously sneaked a glance at that rose.

It was just like a mischievous child, opening its eye and staring maliciously at Ackerman the moment the bookstore owner left his seat.

This way the ‘flower’ looked at Ackerman was as if it was sizing up its prey.

That gaze could be described as ‘clammy’, like a tongue running along Ackerman’s face and body, and he couldn’t help feeling disgusted.

Fortunately, after the horrors of the first time, he basically wasn’t that afraid now.

After all, it seemed to only devour a person’s desires but it didn’t eat a person whole.

At such a time, Ackerman ought to be glad the bookstore owner was in a good mood. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have moved the ‘flower’ away and stopped it from continuing to devour Ackerman’s desires.

And when the ‘flower’ completely consumed all the desires in his heart, could a person that had lost all desires still be considered a person?

If that happened, Ackerman might have no desire to eat, breathe, or even live. He would become an empty shell, suffering from a fate even worse than death.

But now that he had chosen to become a follower of this bookstore owner, Ackerman had escaped the fate of becoming nutrients for this ‘flower’.

Even though the rose seemed as ravenous as ever, Ackerman’s body no longer froze up, nor did he feel it was dangerous. For the time being, Ackerman had gained its recognition.

As Ackerman inwardly heaved a huge sigh of relief, the bookstore owner returned with a book which he pushed over the counter.

“This book is really suitable for your current situation. I believe that

through this book, you will be able to find a new means to make your dreams come true. Then, you will be accorded the respect and remuneration you deserve and no longer be used by them.”

Under the dim light, the bookstore owner’s smile and the strange, beautiful rose drew an indescribable and mysterious congruity.

With a mix of apprehension and excitement, Ackerman took the book with two hands.

He lowered his head and made out the cover in the dim light.

Sacrifices to the Void

Sacrifices... to the Void?

Ackerman couldn’t help rereading the title again. Following that, an indescribable impulse swept over him. He felt that the book before his eyes contained a strange magic as an ineffable and soft muttering rang in his ears. Unable to control himself, his hands trembled as he flipped the cover open.

Swish...

The pages seemed to turn rapidly on their own.

Ackerman was deeply entranced. He stared fixedly at the book in his hands as his face slowly became numb. It was as if he had gradually gotten himself lost in some fantasy world.

It was like a huge door had opened. Behind the door was a pitch-black darkness without the faintest inkling of light, yet it subconsciously enticed one to explore what lay beyond this darkness...

Was it eternal death or perhaps a withering void?

Countless magnificent and horrifying plans flickered across, furiously alternating between imagination and reality.

Ackerman’s mind felt like it was splitting and a ferocious roar of a savage beast welled up in his chest, yet Ackerman couldn’t tell

whether he was reading a book in a bookstore or actually traversing through that expanse of darkness.

This was a familiar sensation. Many days and nights, the hallucinations brought about by beast mutation tortured him.

But it was different this time.

Ackerman clearly felt as if something was ‘gouged through’ and along with the pain, a channel took form in his body.

One end of the channel was him, and the other end was that unfathomable void.

In this boundless and expanding cosmos, those nameless gods had humongous bodies, distorting together and forming a muddled mass. Through the darkness, many avaricious gazes bore down towards Ackerman.

Swoosh!

The entire book was completely flipped through in just a moment.

Ackerman returned to his senses and his hallucinations ceased.

He felt that he had just witnessed a great deal of taboo knowledge, yet at the same time, he felt that he had just seen a blank book.

Only the channel that linked to the void existed as clear as day.

“A new means...”

Ackerman’s entire body trembled as he muttered to himself.

Lin Jie nodded. “That’s right. If you have indeed chosen this path, seizing every opportunity that comes your way was a necessary skill as well. Who wouldn’t want to be able to transact at zero cost, right?”

“These are all gifts from those who have reached the end of the path. Grasp them properly and things will be much easier.”

Ackerman closed his eyes, sensing the channel to the void that was now would always be opened, and felt a sense of understanding.

He knew that he was now being watched by a few entities.

As long as he used the channel and provided suitable offerings to these hallowed entities, he would be bestowed with certain things that he needed. But of course, this depended on the moods of these hallowed entities.

This was indeed having to seize every opportunity, and also... a gargantuan zero cost transaction.

Lin Jie continued on earnestly. "However, just seizing opportunities alone wouldn't let you obtain success. This is a very long path and what you need is to get stronger, whether in spirit or any other aspect. The current you definitely won't make it... I hope that you are able to achieve what you want the next time I see you again."

Ackerman tried his best to control his shaking. "Thank you for your guidance. I know what I must do."

He no longer had any words to describe how powerful this bookstore owner was.

He could finally sense the powerful aetheric fluctuations of those hallowed entities in the void.

Without a doubt... Supreme-ranks.

Just any one of these entities appearing could easily cause a catastrophe.

However, this bookstore owner had a nonchalant attitude and merely called them 'those who have reached the end of the path'.

Ackerman believed that he was fortunate to have been selected to be such a chess piece. The path forward was definitely going to be a lot more interesting.

Seeing the customer's face filled with resolve as he left as well as his own accounts book made Lin Jie nodded his head with a bright

smile plastered on his face.

Once again, Teacher Lin's teachings have helped another lost soul.

This was the positivity that Life ought to have.

Chapter 62 Blood And Flesh Gos

Chapter 62: Blood and Flesh Gos

Ji Zhixiu was reading.

The lace-wrapped table lamp emitted a bright light that wasn't glaring, illuminating the many books and scrolls on the desk, a flower vase with daisies, an ink bottle with a feathered quill, a pearl adorned incense box, and a pair of glasses.

The surroundings were very quiet and the only sound came from the swish of pages being turned.

Of course, with her current hearing ability, she could easily hear the breathing and heartbeats of the two maids cleaning the house downstairs, just that there was no need to expand her hearing range to that extent now and it was also a sort of torture at the same time.

Due to her increasing power, Ji Zhixiu's control of her entire body had already reached a stage that was close to the pinnacle.

If Ji Zhixiu wanted to, she could even precisely control any single strand of hair on her body.

Most importantly, she was on the verge of thoroughly taming the wild beast within her blood.

As long as she could do so, achieving Destructive-rank would just be around the corner.

"Huu..."

Ji Zhixiu took a deep breath, closed the book, and calmed herself down.

Hints of peppermint, rosemary, and lemon grass wafted out from the incense box and perked her spirits when it entered her nose.

Blood and Beast wasn't just as simple as controlling the sordid blood within her body.

The more Ji Zhixiu studied, the more she realized the profound and deep horrors within.

Blood and Beast... was actually 'Soul' and 'Flesh'.

Blood and soul were the currencies of life. As they circulate and flow within the body, aether is induced.

Controlling blood within the body was just the first step.

How to use that blood and thoroughly turn the beast into her own power was the true path to become stronger.

Right now, Ji Zhixiu was just in control of the amount of blood she had injected into her body.

If she could absorb more, and even obtain the sordid blood of other types of dream beasts, how terrifying would that level of power be...

The power that hunters could harness definitely wasn't just limited to these!

Power is the source of authority.

Now, when compared to the Truth Union, Secret Rite Tower, and the churches, hunters could have an equivalent say.

But Ji Zhixiu alone wouldn't be enough. She still needed more comrades.

Over the past period, she had been practicing in secret and didn't teach this method to anyone else because it was also her first time and she didn't know if it could cause problems.

Losing control of the power of sordid blood had disastrous consequences. Thus, she needed to be cautious.

But it was different now. She had personally utilized this means of

controlling blood and verified that it was indeed safe, reliable, and effective.

She could now begin propagating it.

Ji Zhixiu gently stroked the book's cover as a staunch resolve welled up in her heart.

This would become the gospel of hunters and Mr. Lin who had brought this gospel was the guide that would lead the hunters down their future path.

Knock knock.

A gentle knocking sounded from behind her door.

"Miss, it's time for dinner."

"Got it."

Ji Zhixiu had already foreseen this. She stood up indifferently, pushed aside the chair, and hid the book inside a secret compartment in her desk.

Now, she had shoulder-length hair and was casually dressed in a T-shirt and tight jeans.

But of course, even if she was at home, she still had a dagger strapped tightly to her back underneath that casual disguise of hers and was cutting into her skin.

Even though her physical body was now strong to the point where metal objects like this couldn't hurt her, maintaining her wariness at all times was a good habit.

Ji Zhixiu opened the door and followed the maid to the dining room.

Along the way, she halted in her tracks and looked towards the middle-aged man standing at the door.

"Father." Ji Zhixiu paused for a moment before asking calmly, "Is

something the matter?”

The man standing by the door was Ji Bonong, head of Rolle Resource Development Company.

He had on an elegant suit with a smart vest and white shirt beneath. Behind the gold-rimmed glasses, he wore the same iron gray eyes that Ji Zhixiu had. Overall, there was an inorganic coldness about his entire bearing.

The maid smartly took her leave.

“Can’t I just seek you for a little heart-to-heart chat every once in a while?” said Ji Bonong casually as he turned and headed to the dining room.

Ji Zhixiu smiled, “You never ever come back to eat, nor would you specially get someone to remind me that it’s dinner time. I can’t think of any other reason besides you having some matter to discuss with me.”

Ji Bonong slightly halted in his tracks but then recovered and sat down in his seat. “Is it that obvious?”

“It is,” Ji Zhixiu replied matter-of-factly as she headed to her own seat.

Ji Zhixiu had already heard Ji Bonong’s instructions, but even if she hadn’t, she would still have guessed her father’s intentions easily.

After all, her father was someone who worked all year round and was never at home 364 days out of 365 days. Now, he had suddenly returned home and even specifically gotten a maid to inform her of dinner when Ji Zhixiu had always informed the maids not to disturb her.

In any case, he definitely wasn’t here just to reminisce over the past.

Ji Bonong’s gaze fell on his daughter’s face as he sighed. As there hadn’t been much interaction in recent years, Ji Bonong was still stuck with the image of his daughter around the age of 16 or 17.

Thus, he wasn't used to the current Ji Zhixiu.

"You have grown up," he lamented.

Ji Zhixiu asked, "You aren't really intending to have a heart-to-heart chat, I hope."

Ji Bonong chuckled, then continued. "You can already make your own decisions for these matters but as your father, I still ought to give you some advice from time to time."

"..." Ji Zhixiu was silent for a moment. "Go on."

"In the past, I never asked what you were doing because, whether it was White Wolf or any hunter group, they were merely chess pieces casually being used by others. I sent Kaiyi and Marcus to you and that should have been enough. But now, it's no longer the same."

Ji Bonong tapped his index finger on the dinning table as he stared at Ji Zhixiu.

"If you really get involved, you represent Rolle Resource Development when you stand before everyone. Do you understand?"

"I understand."

Ji Bonong hadn't expected such a blunt reply. He stalled for a moment, then continued. "Do you? You shouldn't be so impertinent if you understand!"

"I really do understand." Ji Zhixiu raised her head. "The reason why you and I are having this conversation is because you saw the plans in my diary, right? And thus, you came to counsel me."

The corners of Ji Zhixiu's lips curled upwards. "I wrote it down on purpose."

Ji Bonong's pupils contracted. This was totally unexpected.

He eyed Ji Zhixiu, then pointed to himself. "You wrote those plans on purpose and intentionally let your subordinates discover them to

make me return home?”

“Mm.” Ji Zhixiu leaned back and folded her arms. “Naturally, plans remain in the head. What sort of fool would write them out for others to see?”

Ji Bonong observed his daughter in silence for a while before sighing. “Looks like you have really grown up. I shouldn’t have been still treating you like a kid.”

“How would I have been able to deceive you if you hadn’t been treating me as a kid?” Ji Zhixiu said with a smile.

“Since it’s like this, you do seem very confident in convincing me.” Ji Bonong’s gaze deepened. “Tell me, what is your bargaining chip?”

Ji Zhixiu met her father’s gaze and replied skeptically, “Didn’t you already send someone to my room to take it?”

“How... How did you know?”

She copied the bookstore owner’s habit and rested her chin on her two hands as she smiled delightedly while watching her father’s shocked expression.

In the sky above, unseen to others, tentacles of an octopus-like essence extended all around, allowing Ji Zhixiu to have a clear grasp of everything going on in the house.

Ji Zhixiu pulled out the true Blood and Beast from within the ‘ripped’ flesh of her back and waved it. “This here, is my bargaining chip.”

Chapter 63 Businessman

Chapter 63: Businessman

Ji Bonong had to admit that he had severely miscalculated this time.

As the head of Rolle Resource Development Company, he naturally had close ties with countless organizations.

He had dealings with the Truth Union, Secret Rite Tower, hunters, magicians, churches, and ordinary citizens, and would rarely find himself having miscalculated in his plans.

But this time, he seemed to have blundered twice in a row dealing with his own daughter.

His own kin whom he thought he completely understood had actually surprised him and even foreseen his actions and considerations.

This was partially due to his own carelessness and natural trust in his daughter, but a miscalculation was still a miscalculation, regardless of the situations.

This left Ji Bonong awash with complicated emotions.

There was ‘disgrace’ from having his ‘calculations’ contradicted by his daughter.

There was also gratification that his daughter had truly grown up even though he hadn’t been there to witness the process.

There was also guilt from neglecting his daughter for so many years.

Unknowingly, the image of this young girl awkwardly struggling with learning etiquette had already become a fine woman who exuded confidence and had made her own father fall into her trap.

Those hereditary iron-gray eyes were the calm, patient eyes of a hunter.

“Is this your bargaining chip...”

Ji Bonong eyed the book in Ji Zhixiu’s hand.

Blood and Beast was the title of this book and its contents were the reason behind how Ji Zhixiu had gotten so strong in such a short time.

However, he understood that this book wasn’t necessarily the bargaining chip Ji Zhixiu talked about. Or perhaps it wasn’t just this book.

As Ji Zhixiu’s father, Ji Bonong was well versed with his daughter’s ‘innate talent’ at being a hunter.

Her first sordid blood injection had been from a batch of Ji Bonong’s goods.

That’s right. Rolle Resource Development Company was just a mega conglomerate that monopolized the resource industry in the lower districts to the eyes of ordinary people. However, in the world of extraordinary beings, it was a circulation channel for many goods that were out of the ordinary.

Therefore, it could be said that the process of Ji Zhixiu becoming a hunter then establishing herself within them had been entirely within Ji Bonong’s scope of control. It was only after Ji Zhixiu had been amongst the hunters for some time and gradually gained her own power did Ji Bonong relaxed the protection around her.

However, the most fundamental protection hadn’t been dropped at all. For example, the red pear-shaped earring Ji Zhixiu wore was actually a philosopher’s stone with a high level of purity, inscribed with a resurrection sigil left behind by a Supreme-rank white magician.

The artifact’s name was ‘Tear of Blaze’ and even Rolle Resource Development Company only had one such piece which Ji Bonong gave to Ji Zhixiu.

Thus, Ji Bonong had always viewed the actions of his daughter merely as stress-relieving entertainment.

Up till Ji Zhixiu got caught up in the Magic Ovum Mirror affair and had even written down such audacious plans in her diary.

Ji Bonong's understanding of his daughter was that she definitely couldn't have gotten so much stronger all of a sudden. Furthermore, Ji Zhixiu hadn't injected even more sordid blood either.

Moreover, the plans that were recorded down were unbelievable. Making plans hadn't been a strong point of Ji Zhixiu. However, those written plans were thoroughly meticulous and the contents inside were like a violent storm threatening to blow up.

Ji Bonong was able to perceive that there was definitely someone guiding Ji Zhixiu from behind.

It wasn't the book but its origins that was important.

Ji Zhixiu placed the book on the table, then clasped her chin once more. "Call off your subordinate."

Feeling helpless, Ji Bonong called for his subordinate to return. What had been placed in the hidden compartment was a fake copy.

"Looks like he has really changed you greatly."

Ji Bonong then went on with a heavy tone. "However, this still isn't enough to convince me. Such a decision involves Rolle Resource Development a lot."

Ji Zhixiu didn't find it surprising that her father knew about the contact between herself and the bookstore owner. She replied, "Businessmen are willing to do anything as long as there are sufficient benefits involved. I believe that you wouldn't be an exception."

"It might be so for ordinary businessmen, but we are different..." said Ji Bonong.

Ji Zhixiu interrupted, "A book like this is merely something that can

be casually sold over the counter. If his approval and distribution rights are obtained, would you consider it good or bad for the company?"

Ji Bonong pondered for a bit before speaking, "But, from the information provided by Secret Rite Tower, that S-rank's stance is still considered undetermined."

"From my few interactions, I can see that Mr. Lin has his own set of principles and actions and acts like how a 'bookstore owner' is supposed to be. As long as you comply with his wishes, he is actually rather good-natured and amicable."

Ji Zhixiu then continued, "However, I'm not an expert at this, nor do I have the qualifications to speak with Mr. Lin on behalf of Rolle Resource Development. If you think that this matter is feasible, it would be best to personally go over and have a chat. Then you can decide whether to trash my plans, or... continue implementing it."

In a dark room, the remaining senior members of White Wolf were seated around a table and in the midst of an intense argument.

White Wolf leader, Heris, was seated at the head of the table.

"The situation is getting even more and more severe. We have lots of casualties and our numbers are dwindling. We no longer have any way of continuing to battle with Secret Rite Tower!"

"They haven't even dispatched higher-level knights yet. There's no chance of victory anymore..."

"Stop saying such useless things. We have already reached a point where we have no way of stopping and can only continue on!"

"How do we continue?! Scarlet Cult has been completely defeated. Without sufficient power, there's also no way of incubating the Magic Ovum Mirror. I don't even know how we can even continue!"

"Sir Heris, you see..."

“Silence!”

Heris raised his voice as he stood up and slammed the table. “All of you shut up. We still have a chance!”

Everyone quietened down and looked towards Heris.

Heris eyed the entire room with a malevolent expression as he enunciated each word clearly. “Remember. Our goal is to hatch the Magic Ovum Mirror and not to defeat Secret Rite Tower. We will win as long as we get the ovum to hatch.”

“But...”

“I don’t wish to hear any more wavering. In three days, the Truth Union will be transporting a batch of Sky Silver Stones at 78th Avenue. We must get our hands on them, understood?”

“Yes.”

Everyone got up and bowed. For the time being, it was unanimous.

After everyone had left, Heris leaned back in his chair. He no longer had the same confident expression and what remained was only weariness and loss.

A batch of Sky Silver Stones wasn’t enough to hatch the Magic Ovum Mirror. Heris had said all that to get them to stop fighting.

In actuality, White Wolf had already reached a dead end.

“I can help you resolve your problem.”

“Who are you!” Heris got up suddenly and looked in the direction of this voice.

A pair of cold, snake-like pupils stared at him through the darkness, accompanied by a muffled yet alluring tone. “The Magic Ovum Mirror is a torch and the most precious fuel is life...”

Chapter 64 Transfer Application

Chapter 64: Transfer Application

Joseph was walking along the ring-shaped passageway atop Secret Rite Tower. Many people moved along these passageways and would bow or nod and give a “Good morning, Sir Knight,” whenever they passed.

At Joseph’s side, Claude was looking through a file and said, “Teacher, our tracking and analysis of White Wolf’s movements have narrowed down to the location of this place.”

Joseph snorted an “Mmph.”

Claude continued with his report. “These hunters’ understanding of Norzin’s structure is many times better than ours. They are just like a bunch of rats scurrying within the walls, only giving occasional squeaks but leaving no traces.

“Whenever our men are chasing them, these hunters always tend to disappear and we are only able to slowly do a ground sweep. However, this process is much too slow, so we used sightings of them to deduce and narrow down the range of where their activities take place.”

Joseph narrowed his eyes and replied, “This city was built too long ago and the only true maps are the ones inside the heads of old people. Obtaining a complete map is practically an impossible task. There isn’t anyone in the White Wolf organization capable of this, so I believe that someone is helping them.”

Claude immediately started taking down notes. While flipping a page, he remarked, “Over the last few days, we have already raided three of their large hideouts and have captured over twenty White Wolf hunters who are currently being interrogated.

“However, they are rather tight-lipped. We have tried using mind-related spells but the basic mental state of these hunters... are especially fragile, probably due to injecting sordid blood close to the threshold. Thus, they immediately go crazy when provoked.”

“This method to avoid questioning has quite some originality. Becoming lunatics in advance means not having to fear divulging any information. I suppose we would only find a pile of mush if we smashed their skulls open,” scoffed Joseph sarcastically.

“White Wolf are probably aware that they have no way out and are thus becoming even more frantic and illogical. They aren’t just limiting themselves to intercepting resources and are even causing destruction and killing all over, causing panic for citizens.” Claude then added, “It’s also gotten rather busy for Logistics recently.”

Having almost reached his own office, Joseph asked, “Is there any pattern to their destruction and killing? The Magic Ovum Mirror’s special characteristic is that it entices the heart. Their thirst for the Magic Ovum Mirror would have far surpassed their own desires. At such a time, the probability of them doing so to vent isn’t that high.”

“At present, they aren’t just wantonly killing but taking certain parts from corpses as well, probably wanting to duplicate some of Morphey’s rites. But, after we made comparisons, we haven’t been able to find any corresponding sacrificial rite conditions. However...I have a question.”

Claude frowned and posed his question. “Is the Truth Union really incapable of producing a complete schematic of Norzin? If that is the case, even a portion would enable our operations to run more smoothly.”

Joseph eyed his student, and smiled. “A portion of all these secret passageways and hidden spots were built by the Truth Union personnel. Do you think they would give you a complete map?”

“We don’t need a complete one, just a portion we can use.”

“Just a portion!” Joseph put up a finger. “And that would be

enough for an architectural analysis to determine areas and point out where other secret paths are. Dear Claude, it's alright to be dumb but I reckon that I would find an adorable little hole should I smash your skull open."

"...Alright."

Despite receiving such harsh remarks from his own teacher, Claude scratched his head and sighed helplessly. He had long gotten used to Joseph's mannerisms.

Even though Claude didn't know what these secret passages were used for, it was clear that these scholars definitely couldn't hand over those blueprints and might even flat out deny the existence of such materials.

"Just treat it as a training exercise. White Wolf can't endure for much longer." Joseph patted Claude's shoulder and muttered, "If we were to ask those Truth Union hypocrites, they would probably say that gathering comprehensive intelligence reports, analyzing clues, and tracking their movements are the job of our Secret Rite Tower's Intelligence Branches. If we can't even do this well, we might as well dissolve the Intelligence and Logistics Branches.

"Ridicule from outsiders would be more unbearable than whatever I say to you.

"But looking at things from a different angle, if we are able to find out where the Truth Union's secret pathways and hidden locations are, we will definitely have secured next years' expenditure funding.

"The Truth Union is so rich, the hush money they fork out definitely wouldn't be little," said Joseph as he scrutinized his disciple.

A new extortion scheme has already appeared...

Claude was momentarily dumbstruck. He shut his mouth and nodded, before remembering to utter an "understood."

Joseph put his hand away and continued to his office steadily. As he opened the door, he asked, "What about Scarlet Cult?"

Claude coughed uncomfortably, then cleared his throat. “After losing Morphey, Scarlet Cult has completely fallen into disarray and lacks any cohesiveness. A majority of their numbers were living dead controlled by Morphey. Now that Morphey has died, these bodies have since lost the ability to move and the remaining Scarlet Cult black magicians have either run away or sought out shelter from White Wolf.”

“In any case, Scarlet Cult has ceased to exist.”

“It really is terrifying. That Destructive-rank elf sage can really be considered a powerful entity,” he lamented. “From the scene, Morphey was simply crushed.”

Of course, the even more terrifying entity was the S-rank bookstore owner whom the Iris Clan’s great sage acknowledged as a master.

The matter that day was only known by a few members of the Intelligence Branch and a few high-ranked knights in Secret Rite Tower.

However, the various guesses and discussions of this bookstore owner were mostly without exception, apprehensive and fearful.

“We really ought to thank Mr. Lin this time. Otherwise, we might only have known that there was another Destructive-rank black magician with more destructive power than Wilde hidden in Norzin only after Morphey had caused widespread damage.”

“The Truth Union are really a bunch of good-for-nothings,” sighed Joseph as he placed the file Claude handed over onto the table. “Carry on with your work, I’ll look into it more.”

Claude had originally come to deliver the file and thus, nodded and stepped out of the office.

Ding.

The computer on the office desk suddenly indicated a notification.

Joseph clicked on it and realized it was an email.

[Respected Mr. Joseph, the elders have replied to your application request. Please take a look.

Knight Abraham Joseph. Your application for the transfer of the demon sword Candela has been rejected after much deliberation.

However, your opinions are an important assessment of the elder's views on S-rank zone 0113. Thus, the elders have already dispatched personnel to investigate. If the final assessment is identical to your opinion, your application would be reassessed for approval.]

Chapter 65 Your Next Words

Chapter 65: Your Next Words Are

Tack tack.

A clacking of high heels mixed with the sound of rain.

The umbrella-wielding lady standing in the rain had a graceful poise. She was beautiful, fair-skinned with a head full of wavy silver hair, and deep, alluring eyes.

Her outfit of a white blouse, tight violet skirt, black lace stockings, and a pair of black high heels oozed with sexiness.

Caroline raised her umbrella as she surveyed the bookstore before her and took a deep breath of the cold, moist air.

This was her current target for assessment.

S-Rank Zone 0113.

A seemingly ordinary bookstore yet this was something the former Radiant Knight Abraham Joseph had personally written in the new case file.

Moreover, it had come after various scattered intelligence reports.

This bookstore had a great deal of influence during the Magic Ovum Mirror affair and had indirectly caused the speedy demise of White Wolf and Scarlet Cult.

Also, the bookstore owner had made Joseph come to a decision of wanting to pass on the ownership of the demon sword.

The demon sword Candela was an object of the abyss that would even strike fear in a Supreme-rank.

No matter how strong a person was, the demon sword's corrosion of spirit and mind was unavoidable and would eventually lead to the

person's demise.

Ever since Secret Rite Tower took in this artifact, they would select the most perfect Radiant Knight to be the owner of Candela, and ensure the demon sword's temporary peace and to put it to better use.

But as Radiant Knights died one after the other, Secret Rite Tower felt utterly helpless towards the demon sword's curse, and so they let Joseph do as he pleased to achieve a temporary impasse.

However, Joseph's application for the transfer of ownership came as an immense shock to the higher-ups of Secret Rite Tower.

This was the bookstore owner's first ever request recorded.

And he wanted to have the demon sword.

According to Joseph's report, the book that the bookstore owner had given him possessed the power to suppress the demon sword.

That meant to say, the bookstore owner had the ability to better accommodate the demon sword.

And his reason for wanting it was because he could see Joseph's pain and wanted to save him.

However, the elders couldn't just let out the demon sword solely because of Joseph's words, especially since Secret Rite Tower had yet to gain any substantial information regarding the bookstore owner.

In the end, after some discussion amongst the elders and coupled with the recent incident, a decision was made to have a thorough close-up assessment and observation to determine the bookstore owner's identity, alignment, motive, and ability.

Lucy Caroline, the special dispatch of Secret Rite Tower's elders, the Deputy Section Chief of Logistics Branch, a Destructive-rank knight, and a specialized assessor.

Being a quarter-harpy with an innate talent for mind

control, Caroline was naturally adept in determining whether one was good or evil.

Of course, as the Logistics Department's Deputy Section Chief, her official job was actually to clean up the messes of Secret Rite Tower and other organizations as well as to deal with public relations.

In the minds of ordinary Norzin citizens, extraordinary beings were just but a myth. Caroline and the others like her needed to exhaust all means to cover up the truth and speedily resolve various circumstances that would expose themselves.

Caroline might not be the most outstanding of Secret Rite Tower assessors, but she was without a doubt, the most staid one.

Thus, this was the reason she had been entrusted with this important and dangerous mission.

Not everyone could get a chance to observe and assess an S-Rank entity.

She reminded herself of the current mission once more—As Secret Rite Tower's representative, she was to converse with the bookstore owner using the identity of a customer and do her best to completely fill up the case file of S-Rank zone 0113 and help supplement the elders' judgment.

Caroline took a deep breath, steadied herself, and stepped into the bookstore.

"Welcome."

The bookstore owner's voice sounded from behind the counter.

Even though Caroline had already made mental preparations prior to this, she couldn't help but tensing up and her breathing became more hurried.

S-Rank... A terrifying entity that was rumored to have knocked Joseph out cold without lifting a finger.

Ba-dump, Ba-dump!

Caroline sensed her heart thumping and pinched her palm. She put on her customary charming smile, took a deep breath, and sat down in front of the counter. Trying her best to retain her composure, she looked at the bookstore owner and nodded. "Hello."

Lin Jie placed his book down and eyed this beautiful silver-haired lady with some astonishment. This is... rather exaggerated, thought Lin Jie to himself.

He wasn't thinking that this appearance was pompous. On the contrary, the silver hair of this maiden that had entered the bookstore complemented her just too well and somehow made her appearance breathtaking.

Just that this powerful bearing was too much and it made Lin Jie feel that the other party shouldn't be in his own shabby bookstore but on a red carpet instead.

And what Lin Jie paid most attention to was that extremely alluring smile.

That smile's angle, expression, and degree of proficiency...

Although the other party's gender as a female might partially cause some distinction, this sort of... involuntary sense of familiarity rising in Lin Jie's heart couldn't be false.

As Lin Jie realized this, his so-called 'professional' smile lightened up slightly.

This person...

Someone of the 'same trade,' huh.

That standard 'hello' and smile have already exposed you completely.

Sales? Or will you be asking me to do a questionnaire?

Heh...

Lin Jie scoffed inwardly. He had seen too many of such people.

When such people came knocking, besides being a waste of time, they wouldn't have any intention of purchasing or borrowing books.

Whatever warm welcome and words he had prepared was kept away.

In other words, the person in front of him wasn't a customer.

Besides not being a customer, she might even be trying to make Lin Jie spend.

However, the Teacher Lin title wasn't an undeserved reputation.

Since you dared knock on my door, even if it's not sales but multi-level marketing, I will still treat you as a customer.

Bring it on!

Lin Jie folded his arms and put on a steely gaze.

Let me guess, your next words are——

“May I ask,”

“May I ask...”

Caroline froze and stared with her mouth wide open at the bookstore owner that had said the same words simultaneously.

Foresight?!

She glanced at the bookstore owner's seemingly mischievous expression.

Is this... A direct warning? Section Chief Joseph, didn't you say he was 'friendly'?!

Lin Jie revealed a confident smile as he noticed the lady's calm bearing shattering in an instant, his indifferent look telling the other party that 'I have already seen through you.'

Firstly, suppress the other party with an imposing manner and immediately break her rhythm. This would mess up her thoughts

and her words would lose all effect.

Chapter 66 Evaluation Of Lin Jie

Chapter 66: Evaluation of Lin Jie

In an exchange, it was important to make the other party get caught in one's own tempo.

All conversations were ultimately a form of psychological warfare, where being in control of the other party's state of mind and using words to probe their heart will ensure the victory of the battle.

The most important of all was to immediately drag the other party into one's tempo when they showed hesitation.

And the simplest way was by using questions.

One could rapidly guide the other party into one's own tempo through specific means or obvious hinting.

Whether it was in sales or at other occasions, gaining a thorough understanding of a customer's desires and thoughts would make it easy to choose the right approach.

And after that, as the saying goes, one would be able to lead the other party by the nose.

A simple analogy would be like this—

If a teacher were to ask, “Do you all agree? Those who disagree raise your hands.” There would be a certain possibility that some raised hands would appear.

But if the question was “Do any of you object? Those who object raise your hands.” If this were the case, nobody would put up their hands unless they were an idiot.

Therefore, according to customary logic, this person's ‘hello’ would surely be followed up by a question.

And through Lin Jie's deduction from his many years of experience, the follow-up would be a 'may I ask...'

She wanted to lead the conversation and thus needed to take the initiative and occupy the position of the one questioning.

As a self-proclaimed conversation therapist, life mentor, and chicken soup provider, Teacher Lin's mastery had clearly reached a high level far beyond any ordinary person.

How could he let her prevail?

Lin Jie placed his chin on his hand and calmly said, "There's no need to be so shocked. Don't tell me you didn't think about what you might encounter when you chose to enter this shop? Moreover, you specifically came over to me... Young people shouldn't be too impulsive."

When frequently walking by the riverside, getting one's shoes wet was unavoidable. Meeting others of the 'same profession' was a common occurrence.

In any case, this 'shabby store' was still running a business, so encountering someone of the same profession was just expected.

Furthermore, she had the intention of promoting something and had come straight to the boss. This itself was rather strange.

Lin Jie reckoned that she was probably an upstart who was a little swell-headed from having gotten some achievements and thought her verbal skills could do everything.

Having control and leading the conversation was extremely addictive. Dominating a conversation with another salesperson instead of clients definitely brought about a greater sense of achievement.

Haa, young people nowadays are just so impatient.

Caroline froze up and instantly understood that she had been completely seen through.

As a professional assessor and special representative to go face-to-face with an S-Rank, Caroline had spent the past few days preparing for various scenarios, including having her cover blown. However, when it really happened so suddenly, how could she not be astonished and feel afraid?

When the two of them had spoken the same words simultaneously, a hair-raising sense of fear had swept over her.

It was as if she was transparent in the eyes of the bookstore owner and every single of her thoughts could be casually read by him.

And could the meaning of that last sentence be a warning because he was displeased at being disturbed when they had gone specifically to him?

“... I’m truly sorry if there’s anything that upset you. And I’m very sorry to have disturbed you.”

Caroline took a deep silent breath to steady herself before she continued, “However, it is necessary for me to ask you questions. This is very important to both you and me. We will be very grateful if you are able to cooperate. After all, this is of great significance to Norzin.”

It’s alright, the bookstore owner has been adopting a peaceful stance up till now.

He’s probably seen through my motive and just wanted to intimidate and put me in my place. He hasn’t shown any sign of malice so maintaining my respectful attitude should be enough.

Just that I no longer have to pretend to be a customer.

This was what was going through in Caroline’s mind.

It was indeed just as Joseph had written in his report. The bookstore owner had an ordinary appearance.

Even though he expressed dissatisfaction at their attempts to sound him out, the bookstore owner had only attempted to cower them via deterrence and hadn’t actually taken any action. This meant that

he had a decent temperament and wasn't 'hostile.'

Lin Jie observed her. The beautiful lady had an expression of firm resolve, although there was also a part that showed some unambiguous concession.

An apology first, followed after with a question of importance with the intention of inciting some curiosity.

Lin Jie guessed that this lady was possibly doing a survey, either to find a suitable product to promote or to do research for a certain project.

However... bringing Norzin into the picture was especially audacious indeed.

Lin Jie leaned forward and smiled, "How about telling me what this is about?"

Seeing that the bookstore owner didn't object, Caroline cleared her throat and continued cautiously, "May I ask why you opened the bookstore here?"

It's actually such a question?

She probably isn't trying to market a product, but instead doing some research for a specific purpose.

"Interest dictates fate," replied Lin Jie casually.

He couldn't say that he was transmigrated because of a certain unknown entity and had no choice but to sell books to maintain a livelihood...That would be too disgraceful.

Caroline was momentarily stunned and immediately remembered that the bookstore owner had an interest in toying with the fates of humans and other matters.

She then pointed outside and asked carefully, "Then, what do you think about the recent incident?"

Recent incident? The gas explosion?

Could it be that they are actually intending to develop this expanse of ruins?

But it made sense. The few streets opposite were completely wrecked and it could be considered a thorough decision. So why not do some development and perhaps earn some money back.

Lin Jie nodded subconsciously and muttered, “A good thing....”

He suddenly came to his senses and choked, “Cough, cough, it isn’t. That incident was really unfortunate but there are some people who ought to pay indeed. Life is precious and not something to be taken lightly and trampled all over.”

Lin Jie had heard on the news that this tragedy had been the result of poor supervision at factories and the many years of disrepair. Evidently, some people needed to take responsibility for the matter.

Caroline nodded and noted down that the bookstore owner indeed disliked Scarlet Cult’s black magicians and had an identical standpoint with Secret Rite Tower.

“One other question—— What’s your opinion on what you are currently doing now?” Caroline asked.

Lin Jie pondered about the relation this question had with the previous ones.

She asked about why I set up the shop, my thoughts on the gas explosion incident, and on my current circumstances. She’s probably evaluating the value of shops in the area...

“I am different from others so you can’t really use me as a reference.” Lin Jie flashed a dazzling smile. “Actually, I don’t expect any benefits or reciprocation when I do all these. I embrace empathy and hope that every customer can walk out from the predicaments they are in.”

Chapter 67 Sorrow Of A Corporate Slave

Chapter 67: Sorrow of a Corporate Slave

“Just solely because of empathy?” muttered Caroline.

“Is that still not enough?” asked Lin Jie. “Every-time I try to understand the reasons behind my customer’s pain and suffering, I would always feel the need to save them from drowning in their sea of bitterness. Otherwise, that would really be too cruel.”

Of course, while saving them, rescuing their wallets at the same time is even better, thought Lin Jie to himself.

He was just such a kind and warmhearted soul who couldn’t see the bad in others.

Caroline agreed inwardly. This was similar to Joseph’s recount of his interaction with the bookstore owner.

He was friendly, but chaotic neutral.

With ‘inspiration’ stemming from empathy, this bookstore owner frequently sympathized with customers and thus helped to lead them out from their current predicament.

But regardless of any standpoint, this sort of empathy was purely just towards helping others.

The bookstore owner’s ‘sentiments’ didn’t change regardless of what sort of alignment a customer had.

This kind of sentiment was on a way higher level than what ordinary beings possessed.

Caroline suddenly came to a realization. That’s right! He is indeed a genuine Supreme-rank!

It's no wonder he could make the Iris Clan's elf sage pledge fealty!

This wasn't because of his overwhelming strength but his extraordinary and non-discriminatory love.

Did he mean a comparison between himself and other Supreme-ranks when he said that 'I'm different from others'?

It was very different indeed. Past Supreme-ranks that existed were usually selfish because they were first and foremost, human. Supreme-rank was merely a description of their strength.

However, the bookstore owner was close to the essence of such an evaluation...

Lin Jie's opinion of this 'customer' was simple.

Asking Lin Jie why he set up shop here was to understand the advantages of this district.

For example, convenience of transport, human traffic, or unique societal customs.

Replying why would be answering her motives.

The underlying objective was to find whatever merits there were in this area.

It was much more effective than asking 'What do you think is good about this place.'

When Lin Jie did some customary observations, he would also probe using questions similar to this and they would often pinpoint the merits and weaknesses rather quickly.

And her asking about the gas explosion incident was more straightforward—she was asking about how the people around had been affected.

Under most circumstances, investigating this aspect meant that the other party's motives were related to the gas explosion incident.

Lastly, she had asked him about the circumstances of his shop.

This meant that she was mainly trying to understand the general situation of shops in the vicinity after the gas explosion had leveled the expanse of land just ahead.

Clearly, the company that this office lady was from wanted to do research to evaluate the developmental value of this area and then get the rights for developing this expanse of ruins.

However, Lin Jie had been hauled over by Blackie and the arrangement of this bookstore had been entirely random. Therefore, Lin Jie could be considered an outlier.

And the reason for using such ambiguous means for questioning was probably to keep it a secret from other rival competitors.

However, even if it were the case, Lin Jie still wanted to promote himself.

From the lady's well-practiced professional bearing, Lin Jie guessed that the company she was from was certainly big since they sent someone of her caliber for research.

"I match the people with suitable books and hope that they are able to overcome their momentary troubles and gain some realization about themselves. Although there isn't much revenue, seeing customers sweep away their gloom and invigorate themselves once more makes me very happy."

Lin Jie's smile was especially dazzling.

"I am more than willing to provide aid and guidance to help people get through their predicaments. Take you for example—You seem like someone worried about your work."

His smile was even more professional than Caroline's charming smile, as if it had some peculiar ability to make others trust him and speak out their mind.

Since you have already taken up some of my time for these questions, then I shall use you to publicize my store in return.

It would be great if there was a greater effect in publicity.

And if that wasn't possible, Lin Jie would at least have gotten himself a new customer.

The reason he opened his bookstore here was because he hoped to see the happy smiles on everyone's faces, and not because of that little bit of money.

Caroline froze momentarily and her expression became complicated. She hadn't imagined that she would have become the object of the bookstore owner's help. However, stepping into the bookstore and asking such questions to the bookstore owner might have seemed like the requests of a 'customer' to him.

More importantly, she indeed felt worried with regards to her own 'work'.

It wasn't just her assignment by the elders to assess this S-rank zone, but also because of the recent troubles caused by White Wolf and Scarlet Cult that made the Logistic Branch very busy trying to cover up each and every one of these skirmishes.

As the Deputy Section Chief, this was especially troubling to her.

Besides providing support to the front-line, logistics also had to make sure that there were no future troubles after each battle.

She opened her mouth. "I..."

Seeing Caroline's hesitation, Lin Jie felt that he had a rough idea on what she was going through.

Maintaining his hold on the conversation, he continued, "Do you all plan to take responsibility for this?"

Even though Caroline had been the first to ask the questions, she hadn't been able to get the upper hand at all.

Lin Jie pointed outside at the faintly discernible wreckage through the gloomy curtain of rain.

Rebuilding three streets was a massive process. It would probably be very troublesome if they wished to take charge of such a project.

A research staff would probably have the responsibility of going door-to-door in a large area for surveys before being able to get a more accurate picture. Just the thought of it could easily stress anyone out.

Caroline nodded. In the face of a Supreme-rank's question, she could only answer nervously, "We have to be accountable. Otherwise, matters might become much worse. Even though it gets very busy, this is my responsibility."

Oh? Looks like this company has lofty ambition. No surprise that they have high expectations of their workers.

Haa... the sorrows of a corporate slave, thought Lin Jie to himself as he studied this 'office lady' and the disdain he had for a fellow 'salesperson' disappeared.

"Poor child, if you don't mind, take a rest here and maybe have a book to read."

Chapter 68 Eyes Of Gazing

Chapter 68: Eyes of Gazing

As a professional, Caroline's cool-headedness, mentality, and ability were well-known in Secret Rite Tower.

The elders wouldn't have chosen to let her interact with a Supreme-rank whose objective and background still weren't defined otherwise.

When going on any mission, she would definitely prepare adequately.

Before coming to the bookstore, Caroline had thoroughly consulted all material and compiled a case file of S-Rank Zone 0113, including Joseph's initial framework, recorded information on 'other customers of the bookstore' as well as the opinions and conjectures left by the other branches of Secret Rite Tower.

Caroline wouldn't dare risk conversing with a Supreme-rank without making thorough preparations.

She knew for certain that this bookstore owner had Supreme-rank ability as well as a rough idea of his general actions and logic.

Firstly, he played the role of an ordinary bookstore owner in this bookstore and would promote 'borrowing', 'buying', and 'reading' of books.

But when comparing the information from before with her own experience now, it seemed as if this bookstore owner just liked helping and chatting with others.

As long as one didn't have any ill intentions towards him nor show any disrespect, the bookstore owner wouldn't do anything. Or rather, he wouldn't do it in person.

Therefore, when the initially skeptical Joseph merely fainted, the

bookstore owner's evaluation of 'friendly' seemed apt when compared to other Supreme-ranks.

Secondly, the bookstore owner was near-omniscient. This was something gleaned from the conversation between the Truth Union's Vice-Chairman Andrew and Iris Clan's Sage, Doris.

These were words out of a Destructive-Rank powerhouse's mouth.

Thus, it was best not to harbor any hidden thoughts nor hope to fluke and get away with having secret motives.

Lastly, all the books within the bookstore contained extraordinary power that was written in the taboo language.

Perhaps these books alone weren't all that powerful but capable of granting success overnight. However, when carefully selected by the bookstore owner, it would definitely be able to help resolve one's problems.

This was his selflessness—

The payment he asked for was nothing much compared to the value of a book and it was probably just part of the bookstore owner role he was playing.

Caroline wasn't surprised when Lin Jie asked her to stay and have a book to read.

Instead, she felt a deep sense of anticipation.

She glanced at the rows and rows of bookshelves. Under the dusky lighting, the neatly arranged books weren't distinct and even seemed somewhat illusionary.

However, without a doubt, a sense of mysticism had stealthily taken form and was clawing at Caroline's heart.

"Can... Can I take a look myself?" With a soul seemingly captivated by this higher level of mysticism, Caroline asked subconsciously.

She only realized after blurting it out and glanced nervously at Lin

Jie. She was worried. What if she had offended the bookstore owner who had already planned to recommend a certain book to her?

Lin Jie didn't really mind. Recommending books was just that. A customer had the freedom to browse any way they pleased.

For example, Ackerman, the working class from before, had wanted to just look around in the beginning and Lin Jie respected his wishes.

A proper business never forced one to buy or sell. It was entirely done by convincing through emotion and reason.

Moreover, Lin Jie could see a clear excitement in the eyes of this lady. Evidently, having to come out in this horrible weather for work was an exhausting affair. Who wouldn't be happy to have a suitable place to take a rest?

Now, he had already turned a city research worker with no desire of purchasing a book into a potential customer, so saying more wouldn't have much more of a significant effect.

This lady had come with her own objectives and her task of evaluating this area wasn't easy. Thus, she definitely wouldn't have a strong desire to get any books.

I'll just let her experience it for herself.

Lin Jie smiled as he made an adjustment for the shelves to display novels and prose-forms. At the same time, he picked up the heated electric kettle and poured Caroline a cup of tea. "Of course. Feel free to look around and chat with me. Isn't this all part of your job?"

He pushed the cup over, indicating that Caroline could take a break from her surveying job and relax a little.

"There's no rush when it comes to making an assessment."

Caroline heaved a sigh of relief. She picked up the cup, gazed at the white wisps of steam, and felt at peace.

She had come with the intention of doing an evaluation and the bookstore owner knew that as well. Despite this, he was still amiable and tolerating.

It was no wonder Joseph had chosen to pass on the demon sword to him.

Possessing such overwhelming strength, yet having such benevolence...

Caroline had already made a decision in her heart. Noticing the bookstore owner had once again started reading his own book, she hesitated for a bit, then walked towards the rows of bookshelves behind the counter with the cup in hand.

Only upon walking further in did she realize that the bookstore wasn't as cramped as she first thought.

There were thirteen rows of bookshelves behind the counter, each at least five meters long. It was only because of the dusky lighting, tight arrangement, and piles of books on the floor that made the entire bookstore seem cramped.

She slowly made her way past the rows of bookshelves as her eyes were drawn towards the spines of displayed books.

Book of Departed Spirits, Seeking the Hidden Flower in Dreams, Chasing Shadows of Past...

The title of every book made her heart pound.

This was something that none of the reports had mentioned. However, despite her excitement, she kept her emotions in check and only made mental notes of these books but didn't pick any at random.

Finally, her gaze fell on a book titled Eyes of Gazing.

Was...this a book pertaining to a certain investigative skill?

Assessing certain matters, goods, or threat level of beings were all part of Caroline's job. To her, this was a very important ability.

Caroline wasn't certain. She brought the book down, took a deep breath, and flipped it open.

Vaguely, the hairs on her body stood on end and she felt as if a pair of eyes was staring at her from behind.

And in front of her, a taboo language drowned out her own reason.

“Can... Can I have this?”

Lin Jie looked up and eyed the book in Caroline's hand.

Watching You Go... Ah...A classic collection of sentimental prose pieces. Lin Jie never imagined that this seemingly tough working lady would actually like such a book laced with delicate sadness.

But, her voice seems a little shaky and her face has paled. Perhaps the contents moved her?

Appearances really are deceiving. It appears like she is a rather sensitive lass deep down.

Lin Jie placed the book into a bag and said, “Are you alright? Ah, this book can be devastating sometimes but it will pass rather quickly.”

Caroline forced a smile. “Devastating... Indeed. But I can get used to it very quickly. Thank you.

“Huu...”

She exhaled and her body shuddered uncontrollably as she touched her eyes.

The sensation of her eyes being gouged out and replaced with a new pair was something she would never experience again in her lifetime.

Her new eyes squirmed as though they were living organisms, and when she looked at other things, she could see all sorts of information appearing and disappearing.

Chapter 69 Demon Sword

Chapter 69: Demon Sword

Swish...

Lin Jie was idly flipping through his register book and checking up on his accounts.

If there were books on loan reaching their due date, he would give a call to customers to remind them. If the books were overdue, he would pay attention to whether there was a problem with the book or with the person.

If it was a problem with the book, he would resolve it accordingly to the situation, either coming to an agreement for compensation. And if that wasn't possible, he would have to pay a visit to the customer to request compensation.

—After all, Lin Jie was usually idle and rather looked forward to such outdoor sojourns.

But unfortunately, there hadn't been any of these kinds of bad customers recently. Instead, he had been receiving good customers like Old Wil and Doris who even brought him some local specialty gifts.

If there was a problem with the person, Lin Jie would also be willing to spare some effort to help the customer, but the book still had to be returned.

In this sense, running a bookstore wasn't really an easy task.

"Hmm... Old Wil has already returned his books. I wonder when he will be back again to borrow another book. Hopefully, he's resolved the issue with Charles as well..."

"Ji Zhixiu's two books are approaching the due date, but there shouldn't be any risk of that young miss not returning the books."

Even if she doesn't return them, it's unlikely she wouldn't give compensation.

"Melissa... I wonder how much of the Five-Threes she's done. Hopefully, she's made some progress and no longer randomly challenges strangers to arm wrestling matches. She really needs to understand that knowledge is true strength.

"Speaking of Melissa... Seems like it's the due date for Joseph's book soon."

Lin Jie flipped to the previous page and saw Joseph's name.

The address he had left down wasn't the same as Melissa's, but Lin Jie had learnt from Melissa that her dad was always busy with work and rarely at home.

Therefore, the address Joseph had written down was probably his workplace.

As Joseph was a veteran, Lin Jie wasn't too worried that the book wouldn't be returned. Even if he wasn't able to properly manage his relationship with his daughter, it was highly unlikely that Joseph would renege on a mere book loan.

Previously, Lin Jie had hinted that Joseph could try to 'open up' to Teacher Lin's psychological counsel and share his problems and worries.

However, even though Joseph seemed a little tempted, he hadn't chosen to immediately trust Lin Jie and said that he would need to think about it, probably because of his instinctive wariness.

This was normal, since it was near impossible to completely trust a person that he had only met and interacted with for less than a day.

However, Lin Jie had planted a seed in Joseph's head and had hopes that this seed would make him become a regular customer.

Whether the seed sprouted or not would still depend on luck.

"But seeing his liking of The Little Prince at that time, the

probability of him returning is rather likely. There's Melissa as well. That little brat is rather easy to swindle... Cough, convince to spend.

"A child prompting a parent is also a rather effective marketing strategy, heh."

Lin Jie smiled at the thought of having already implanted such ideas into an entire family.

He flipped another page forward, browsing through the page before flipping it back.

In actuality, he had already flipped the pages of this thin book a number of times. He had gone through this register book countless times when he didn't have any customers and didn't feel like reading.

He always imagined having a stack of these register books one day and having an endless stream of customers to talk about life and dole out chicken soup to.

Unfortunately, such daydreams always happened during long stretches of lull periods.

His previous customer had been that sultry office lady with wavy silver hair who borrowed *Watching You Go*, and that had already been three days ago.

In the past, the bookstore could go for months without customers so Lin Jie was already accustomed to it.

However, the recent influx of customers had brought about a contrast. Lin Jie would now feel a little lonely whenever there was a period without any customers to chat with.

Jingle.

The bell strung on the door chimed.

Lin Jie immediately looked over and was pleasantly surprised to see that huge, robust figure with a head of weathered white hair.

It was the old man Joseph that had opened the door and entered.

It had been nearly a month since Lin Jie last saw him and Joseph was as imposing as ever. The bulging outline of muscles beneath Joseph's suit and that fierce face gave him an aura akin to a ferocious lion that could easily make others cower in fear.

"Joseph! I was just thinking that it was about time you came to return the book," said Lin Jie with a smile. At this moment, his attention was drawn to the object strapped to Joseph's back.

Even though the lighting in the bookstore was dim, that object possessed an intense presence that shimmered brightly with a brilliance that couldn't be overlooked in the darkness.

It wasn't just the illumination. Lin Jie could discern that the object Joseph carried was long, irregular-shaped and partially wrapped in cloth.

When Joseph reached the counter, the warm lamplight finally revealed the object.

What had been shimmering was a gold cast ornament. Embedded on it were gorgeous gemstones as well as elegant and ancient veined patterns carved on it.

A sword?

Lin Jie made the conjecture instantly.

The part which had glittered with light was clearly a golden sword hilt.

And that length as well as the manner in which Joseph carried it on his back validated Lin Jie's guess.

Was this... Has he also learned from Old Wil and is giving me a 'local specialty'?

Just the sword hilt alone had given Lin Jie a sense of extreme lavishness. He immediately sat up straighter and looked towards Joseph.

Joseph first placed the book he held onto the table and inched forward. “Thank you for your generosity. I have benefited from this book.”

Joseph noticed the opened register book on the counter was on the page he had written down his name on and thus sat down and said, “It looks like you have been waiting for a long time.”

“It really wasn’t that long either,” chuckled Lin Jie. He couldn’t say that he had been estimating when Joseph would return the book and how he should ask for compensation if it wasn’t returned.

He reached forward and picked up *The Little Prince* and flipped through it. After verifying that it was still in a good condition, he made an indication on the register that the book had been returned.

After placing his pen down, he continued with a smile, “You look to be in good shape. It seems like this book did help you during this period.”

Joseph nodded and sighed. “It helped me lessen my pain greatly and allowed me to relax like I’ve never had before. I am extremely grateful to you.”

“You’re welcome. Helping solve my customer’s problems is my greatest pleasure.”

PTSD wasn’t something that could be treated easily. But since a children’s tale could help him relax, this was a special and effective medicine for Joseph.

Being able to bring relief to a customer tormented by an ailment really delighted Lin Jie.

His professional smile deepened. It was time to promote his own psychological counsel—“Oh right, have you thought about what I said previously?”

Joseph took a deep breath and took down the object strapped to his back.

Baam!

The object thudded onto the desk and its cloth wrappings unfurled, revealing it completely.

It was indeed a long sword.

A gold cast hilt adorned with scattered crystals and a thick, solemn-looking white scabbard greeted Lin Jie's eyes.

It was an exquisite work of art.

"I've thought about it," said Joseph. "This is my decision."

Chapter 70 Do You Mind If I Draw It To Have A Better Look?

Chapter 70: Do You Mind If I Draw It To Have A Better Look?

In this gloomy atmosphere, the gorgeous sword seemed to give off a filtered glow.

Disregarding the value of its gold hilt and gemstones, just its emblazonry and the overall model was enough to make any ordinary layman marvel at its exquisite craftsmanship.

Every curvature was gracefully appropriate and even the scabbard was engraved with intricate patterns. Embedded in the middle of its cross-guard was a clear, black crystal.

On a whole, this sword model didn't seem that—— exaggerated.

At a glance, this sword was approximately 1.3 meters long, within the acceptable range of a two-handed sword. The cross-shaped cross-guard wasn't ostentatious either and seemed rather appropriate for a sword of that length.

Just that its make and the decorations were a little over the top.

Although Lin Jie didn't have the professional capability to appraise items, he was able to tell from a glance that the value of such a sword wouldn't be ordinary given the level of craftsmanship, even if the adornments were faux gold and artificial gemstones.

Under normal circumstances, probably no one would bring such a sword to battle, would they?

If it accidentally takes a knock...

Lin Jie's mouth twitched slightly as he scrutinized the shimmering long sword on the counter-top.

This... I did say to entrust me with your worries and burdens, but

what are you trying to do by giving me such a precious sword?

This is your decision?

What sort of decision is this?

Lin Jie then shifted his gaze to study Joseph's expression. The old man's eyes were filled with resolve and relief.

A pensive expression appeared on Lin Jie's face.

This didn't seem like a joke and from their past interaction, Joseph didn't seem like someone who would joke around.

Giving the sword was probably Joseph's answer to Lin Jie's previous suggestion.

And from its extraordinary level of exquisiteness, Lin Jie could discern that this sword was a weapon without much practical use.

It seemed more like a sort of ceremonial sword.

Then perhaps, the meaning of this sword could represent Joseph's experiences, responsibility, and honor from his time in the army.

Lin Jie couldn't help being reminded of Melissa. This child was a natural brat, but from her appearance alone, Lin Jie could tell that she had an upbringing that wouldn't be possible in any ordinary family environment. Moreover, Joseph had very strict and high expectations from Melissa.

Based on this, Lin Jie felt that Joseph might be from a sort of aristocratic military family that perhaps held a post of nobility.

That could also explain where Joseph's strong sense of justice came from.

An ordinary veteran might not possess such an obsession, but it made perfect sense if it was borne from the family clan's teachings from young.

Even though Lin Jie knew that the nobility living in Norzin's central

district were merely all in name, their societal status was still at a higher level than most affluent people.

The histories and past glories of these family clans couldn't be denied.

Now, Joseph had made the gesture to give this sword to Lin Jie. Did he mean to completely give it up?

With caution and respect, Lin Jie cleared his throat and asked, "Are you certain? Is your decision to give this sword to me?"

"This was probably passed down to you. Do you need to reconsider once more?"

"I'm certain," Joseph nodded.

Glancing at the long sword before him, he went on, "You are right. My flesh is willing, but my spirit is weak. Even if it was passed on to me, I no longer have the rights to continue bearing it. It's also about time I learnt to give it up. This sword is too heavy for me and perhaps there isn't any one amongst us capable of inheriting it.

"We can't thank you enough for being willing to take over."

The curse of the demon sword carried the combined resentment of the extinct elf kingdom that even Supreme-ranks were helpless against.

They had suppressed it time after time, but it always ended up in failure.

Yet, they hadn't given up all this time because of Secret Rite Tower's conviction and creed. It was only now that they saw the truth. The elders had also admitted their failure and chosen to agree to Joseph's request to pass on the sword.

Lin Jie sighed. Looks like yet another family clan on the decline...

Moreover, they had probably found a new future path and thus could so decisively pass on this sword to him.

However, this was also inevitable and perhaps even more real than Doris' family clan's matter of losing their entire family clan's *raison-d'être*.

After all, there were no longer any wars in Azir, and even other noble families had waned, let alone the sort of aristocratic military family Joseph was from.

A new path had to be eked out if they wanted to continue existing.

But Joseph was being so polite even when giving Lin Jie a gift. This made the bookstore owner who had recently profited from this father-daughter pair feel... a little embarrassed.

Lin Jie smiled, and reached out to pick up the sword for a closer look. "Hey, there's no need for such formalities. Helping customers is something I take pleasure in. I'm just very happy to be able to help you all."

Mmm... It seems even lighter than I imagined.

A ceremonial sword indeed.

Lin Jie nodded several times as he scrutinized the sword from tip to end. The more he looked at it, the more impressed he got at the sword's details.

Joseph's eyebrows jerked up when he saw the bookstore owner pick up the hilt of the demon sword Candela with one hand and brushed the fingers of his other hand over the body. Even Joseph himself found it strenuous just to lift this sword up...

Even though it was similar in length to any ordinary long sword, the materials used to craft it came from a dream realm. It was so heavy that even a Destructive-rank like Joseph needed to exert a great deal of effort to hold it in one hand if his body didn't use any aetheric powers.

And up till this point, he hadn't sensed any aetheric disturbance from the bookstore owner's body.

Joseph could already see the malevolent energy surging within the

sword's 'demon eye'. A turbulent darkness, threatening to devour whatever it touched.

"It's really beautiful!" Lin Jie didn't spare any praise.

Regardless whether cold or hot, weapons were able to tantalize the thrill of battle in men's blood.

Deep down, he had already taken a liking to this splendid sword and couldn't help asking, "Do you mind if I draw it to have a better look?"

Joseph's heart started pounding. The demon sword's curse was mainly on the blade of the sword.

Because the elven king Candela who had gone crazy had ultimately killed himself using this sword.

This sword had been like a wedge, crucifying Candela's soul to the sword blade for all eternity.

And this sword didn't have a scabbard originally.

The current scabbard had been fitted on by Secret Tower later on, and it had the effect of restraining the curse. But once the sword was drawn, the curse would first assail the wielder, and if that person's will wasn't resolute enough, the wielder might go crazy on the spot.

Even a Great Radiant Knight would need to first be fully equipped before being permitted to come into contact with this demon sword.

However...

The one before Joseph was the bookstore owner after all.

Joseph nodded. "Of course you may... Please be careful."

Lin Jie nodded. Cutting himself would be bad and he definitely needed to be careful.

He then slowly drew the long sword out of its sheath.

Zing...

It was as if a white blaze exploded and illuminated the entire bookstore instantly.

This mirror-like long sword blade was thin yet sharp. It radiated with a dazzling luster and had carvings of an unknown language inscribed on it.

However, Joseph saw black demonic energy oozing out from the tip like some sort of poisonous fluid.

Chapter 71 This Sword Seems A Little Bit Dirty

Chapter 71: This Sword Seems A Little Bit Dirty

Demonic energy bubbled forth from the black crystal that was named ‘demon eye’.

This black and malevolent energy was like smog, flowing down from the blade and turning into countless venomous snakes with blood-colored eyes and avaricious gazes that slithered towards the bookstore owner.

Even though Joseph knew that the bookstore owner was powerful, he felt extremely tense seeing Lin Jie not doing anything as that malevolent energy started to engulf him.

During the time when that ancient kingdom still existed, it was said that the elf king Candela was an existence that could rival gods.

Not a Supreme-rank, but an actual divine being.

Within ancient documents that were since damaged and lost, there were always similar recordings— “With his griffin by his side, Candela had the support of the masses. Wielding light and fire was like him wielding the sun, going against the supreme being that brought a night with no light.”

He was one who stood up in a time where there was no light. The only one who dared challenge that divine being whose name was taboo.

But unfortunately, it ultimately ended in failure.

Even so, the only bit of power he left behind was that powerful.

After Candela’s death, his immense resentment together with his soul were intertwined with that sword, creating this terrifying

curse.

Despite many centuries of baptism and cleansing, there hadn't been any changes at all.

Instead, beings that came into contact with the demon sword would be corrupted by it.

Even Secret Rite Tower's Great Radiant Knights that had undergone rigorous training would all go crazy from the curse's corruption and eventually die.

The bookstore owner was powerful without a doubt. However, the demon sword's curse was something that even Supreme-ranks were helpless against, otherwise, Secret Rite Tower wouldn't have had to use manpower to seal this powerful curse.

Joseph's gaze followed those slithering snake-like energy and his heart raced even more.

This wasn't a mere anxiousness but also anticipation and excitement as if he were witnessing a battle between divine beings spanning over countless centuries in the confines of this tiny bookstore.

He swore that he had never experienced such unstable emotions even in his most exhilarating and life-threatening battles.

Joseph clenched his fists, staring wide-eyed as the surging malevolent energy rose up. As before, the bookstore owner remained unmoved while scrutinizing the details of the long sword.

In just a moment, the snake at the forefront was almost upon Lin Jie's hand.

As he surveyed the sharp shining sword, Lin Jie's attention was drawn to the words on the blade. His eyebrow scrunched up as he tried to get a better look.

The red rose on the counter top shuddered, revealing an eyeball. It gazed at the demon sword fearfully before curling up within its petals.

Joseph held his breath subconsciously.

But at this moment, behind the bookstore owner, an even darker shadow appeared within the bookshelf that wasn't really illuminated by light.

That formless darkness twisted and expanded outwards slowly. Joseph wasn't able to discern what it was, but he experienced an instinctive chill.

The darkness occupying the gaps of the bookshelf behind the bookstore owner was at least three meters tall and still growing.

Joseph felt a slight dizziness watching this scene. Were those eyes or limbs squirming around within that darkness?

Before he even had time to wonder, he saw that the shadow was already beside the bookstore owner and extended a thin, black tendril which had many little eyes on it.

This was a terror way beyond the imagination of any ordinary being.

At the fringes of where light and darkness met, the bookstore owner stood beneath the light, holding on to the sharp sword while behind him was the indescribable darkness. Only a thin tendril reached out from within and revealed its sinister appearance under the light.

Joseph shuddered with fear as he saw that tendril touch the 'demon eye' crystal before entering inside it.

The assault of malevolent energy came to a sudden halt. The black snakes quivered before turning into black wisps of smoke that were furiously sucked back into the 'demon eye'.

Within the perfectly-cut crystal, the sordid and malevolent energy bubbled fervently.

However, this time, it was no longer excited, but terrified and panicked.

To put it into words, this was akin to a scene in a horror film of the

hunted having been caught by the hunter and struggling before the eventual death.

Joseph could practically hear the soundless screams and shrieks via the aether.

He watched as the struggles of the energy within the ‘demon eye’ gradually weakened till all activity ceased, as if they were being thoroughly devoured. Joseph vaguely even felt a little pity for them.

Having ‘eaten its fill’, the tendril retracted back into the darkness.

For a moment, Joseph saw the many eyes within the darkness that were like the countless stars in the night sky move slightly.

And in the next moment, everything had returned to normal.

The darkness within the bookstore was just but a shadow formed from the light.

Actually, as Lin Jie had been studying the blade, he had vaguely felt that the lower half of the blade had become slightly blacker.

At the same time, he also thought that he might have been a little short-sighted—this blade seemed a little dirty.

Lin Jie felt strange and changed the angle of the sword and discovered that the blade had become even brighter, as if it had a new layer of dazzling luster added to it.

The blackness he thought was dirt had already vanished.

When gazing at the hilt, he felt like the black crystal embedded within seemed even more transparent now.

“Eh?”

Lin Jie paused in his perusal of the sword. He felt that viewing the sword from different angles produced a different effect and he couldn’t help raising an eyebrow. “Interesting.”

He once again smiled and exclaimed in praise. “Mr. Joseph, your sword is really interesting. For a moment, I even thought that it was dirty but I never expected it to be a part of the craftsmanship.”

The bookstore owner’s unchanged expression made Joseph quickly come back to his senses before falling into disbelief and doubt again.

Is... is this real?

The unbreakable curse that troubled Secret Rite Tower for so long and took the lives of countless Great Radiant Knights was dissolved in just an instant?!!!

The bookstore owner even said mockingly that this ‘dirty’ curse was just but a part of its craftsmanship. Did he mean to say that it was merely a trifle?

Lin Jie placed the sword back on the counter top and then said, “The words inscribed on it appear to be some sort of ancient Azir language. Do you know its meaning?”

Joseph shook his head absentmindedly as he recovered from the shock with great difficulty. He calmed himself down and replied, “This language has long since been lost. If you require it, I can help you search for relevant materials.”

Lin Jie was thrilled. “I’ll just have to thank you then.”

Revealing a warm smile to Joseph, he continued, “I don’t have anything that can be a reward. But if you wish to read a book, I can give you one for free. How about you try picking out one by yourself?”

Joseph glanced at the dark bookshelf and his face paled. “It’s alright. Thank you, but I think I would like you to recommend me one instead...”

Chapter 72 When The Stars Return

Chapter 72: When The Stars Return

Oh? Lin Jie was slightly surprised. Looks like his words during Joseph's two visits had quite the effect which had brought about a certain level of trust and reliance.

Rather than choosing a book on his own, Joseph trusted Lin Jie to recommend one instead.

Looks like the next one to become a regular just like Old Wil is just around the corner... This is an extremely pleasing progress indeed.

“That's fine as well.”

Lin Jie got up and walked to the bookshelf behind him. After some muttering to himself, he picked out a book. “If that's the case, I think this book would be helpful for your current phase.”

Joseph reached out and took the book, noticing the very distinct title, When The Stars Return.

When the stars... return?

Joseph's heart shuddered and his arms tensed up. A loud creaking sounded from the interior mechanism of his mechanical arm.

Joseph was someone with a great level of control over his ability and had never lost the slightest bit of control over this mechanical arm before. Thus, this really showed how affected he was.

Of course, a part of it was the indescribable terror he felt after witnessing what had appeared within that bookshelf.

To Joseph, that ‘battle of divine entities’ that concluded in just a split second was just like a firework in the night sky, etching an unforgettable brilliance in Joseph's heart.

Unimaginable power that was impossible to comprehend, yet that had merely been the tip of the iceberg...

Joseph thought to himself that if gods truly existed, that would be it.

At the same time, in every mystical domain, the heavens would always represent the ultimate taboo.

What lay beyond the expanse of distant sky was a boundless darkness that made people's hearts palpitate because nobody knew exactly what was within that endless unknown.

And now, a 'god' had produced a book regarding the 'heavens'.

Even if Joseph no longer dared to think about it, he couldn't stop himself from flipping the cover open with slightly trembling fingers.

The bookstore owner behind the counter spoke, "These biographies... oh, it might be a little difficult for you to understand, but you can just consider it as a novel with made up records of another lost civilization."

Another world?!

Does he mean that expanse of heavens? There are civilizations that exist beyond the heavens? Oh Sacred Light above...

Was the bookstore owner telling him about secret information about ancient times, or was it the truth about the world?

Even though Joseph was scared witless, deep down, there was an inner yearning that made him continue turning the pages subconsciously.

Amongst the words, a vast and obscure void warped and twisted. Stars, nebulae, galaxies, past, present, and future. Primal chaos, darkness, space, time. Continuous destruction and rebirth. When the stars coincide, opening their eyes in sync, unfurling their bodies and unleashing a muffled and dreadful cry.

Roar—

“Huu...”

Joseph returned to his senses and took a sharp, deep breath. He calmed down his shaken self and shut his eyes, forcibly stopping his mind from thinking about all these things.

He glanced at the closed book in his hand, suddenly realizing that he had been looking through this book for a whole ten minutes already.

Now, he understood that the bookstore owner's choice of words had been to prevent him from falling into panic. A made up story? More like he was trying to preserve whatever little rationality I had left...

Joseph felt that it would be best to abide by the bookstore owner's guidance and not read too much into it. Otherwise, he would have run outside and howled towards the sky right now.

Fortunately, he had been drifting aimlessly for so many years and was already used to muddling around on his own.

This won't be too bad either, hahahaha...damn!

After having his understanding of everything experience two baptisms, the former Great Radiant Knight Joseph couldn't help realizing how ignorant and insignificant he actually was.

He once again revised his evaluation of the bookstore owner.

It wasn't a mistake by them previously, but rather, because the highest evaluation was only S-rank.

Joseph asked cautiously, “In these... biographies, uh... are these great beings, members of this civilization?”

Lin Jie stopped his own reading and glanced at the book, Stellar Moments of Humankind, wondering what sort of question this was.

However, Lin Jie reckoned that much of these biographies could be rather difficult to understand for Joseph and it made sense for him to be puzzled.

“Of course, they were innovators and witnesses of great moments in the olden civilization’s history. However, nobody can be everlasting and no matter how great these beings were, they would eventually fade away in the long river of time,” replied Lin Jie matter-of-factly.

Joseph stared at the book and nodded his head.

He could sense that there were some powerful entities sealed within this book. And as long as specific conditions were met, these entities could be summoned.

But such a summon practically carried an extremely huge risk...

According to what the bookstore owner had said, these divine entities were great members of a certain higher civilization. However, this civilization, like the ancient kingdom, had died out a long time ago. These beings had also declined, fell, and were sealed up.

As for who had sealed these divine beings... Without a doubt, it was certainly the bookstore owner before him.

Lin Jie noticed the grave look on Joseph’s face and added on, “I know you might be feeling a little confused, but it’s normal. After all, there are many parts of this book which you might be unable to comprehend. Don’t dwell on it too much. The important thing is that you understand the will and intent within these stories and let them be of use to you.”

Joseph’s face twitched slightly. “I think... it might be a little difficult for me,” he answered.

“Don’t be discouraged.”

Lin Jie wrapped the long sword up once more and the gloomy ambiance of the bookstore returned. Smiling, he said, “Since this is the decision you have made, then put in your effort to do it well. Let go of the past, whether it’s your pain or glory, and then face the future bravely.

“Everyone has their own destiny. Perhaps this book might help you to better accomplish your own calling. Challenges are inevitable

when starting a new life. Consider this book as my gift to you. First, use it rationally and then slowly study it.”

Joseph froze for a moment, then nodded his head. “Thank you for your gift and guidance. I have gained much.”

Lin Jie shook his head. “I am merely repeating what others say.

“There’s a particular saying I feel can be imparted to you.” He cleared his throat and chose the words within Stellar Moments of Humankind that he had resounded greatly with. “Only one genius appears in a nation of millions; millions of superfluous hours have to pass until one stellar moment of humanity arises.

“However, when it comes, its influence would affect the course of history for centuries after. “When an individual’s tenacious will collides with predestination, the sparks that form can illuminate the sky of an entire civilization.

“And such times... are a stage for heroes!”

Lin Jie paused for a moment. “Of course, I don’t ask you to be a hero. This world also doesn’t have that many opportunities to build a stage for heroes.”

He smiled and went on, “Don’t view yourself too highly, and don’t even take yourself too lightly. You are a human, and only a part of humankind. Human strength is limited at times. Do what you are able to at the required time and accomplish the ‘destiny’ that belongs to you is more than enough.”

Joseph felt as if he had been taken back to his youth, listening to the teachings of the seniors in the sacred hall of Secret Rite Tower and feeling his spirit surging as he swore to fight for the light.

Gazing at the demon sword in the bookstore owner’s hand, Joseph felt his many years of desolation melt away completely.

“I will... I definitely will.”

Chapter 73 Super Speed Learning

Chapter 73: Super Speed Learning

Joseph walked out clutching the book in his hand. Staring at the gloomy curtain of rain, he felt that he needed to calm himself down.

With deep breaths, he took in the scents of mud mixed with rain. A cold draft of air entered his nose and into his lungs helping him perk up.

Joseph extended a hand and closed his fingers tightly, causing a crisp cracking sound.

He sensed all the strength in his entire body and couldn't help revealing a calm and confident smile.

If there were people who knew the present Joseph, they would be astonished to find that it wasn't the usual sarcastic sneer of the Intelligence Branch Section Chief Joseph. Instead, the image now was the Great Radiant Knight Joseph that had long since disappeared from everyone's eyes.

Bearing the demon sword for so many years had caused Joseph's state of mind to be incessantly corroded by that sinister and malevolent energy. And using his own determination against it had turned it into a troubling shortcoming that made Joseph find it difficult to maintain clear-headedness, rationality, as well as being unable to control his body's strength.

For a knight whose mission was to do combat, being incapable of controlling one's body was a rather dangerous and life-threatening issue.

After the battle with Wilde, such circumstances got even more severe after Joseph lost his right arm.

His recent years of self-abandonment and decline hadn't just been because of this. The factor of the demon sword had considerably contributed towards it.

But now, the demon sword that had bedeviled him for decades had been passed on once and for all. Moreover, the bookstore owner had instantly 'devoured' the curse.

It was as if a chronic illness had been thoroughly eradicated.

The shackles on his mind and body seemed to have been lifted, allowing him to be at ease. Joseph believed with another period of adjustment, he would be able to recover close to his peak strength.

While he might have lost his weapon, he had gained determination, self-belief, as well as a gift from the bookstore owner.

This transaction hadn't been too bad, and he had even profited.

Now, Joseph needed to properly digest this upcoming change.

Fortunately, most of the Intelligence Branch's work right now mainly involved searching for the White Wolf hunter's whereabouts, and Joseph could probably free himself from work and there wasn't any need to handle any cases.

After being away from home for quite some time, Joseph returned and kept his umbrella aside. He inhaled deeply as he stepped inside.

Finally, he could rest and calm his state of mind...

As he entered the hall, Joseph froze.

The hall was completely empty, but there were scattered books all around.

He turned to glance at the quartz clock hanging on the wall. It was 6.30 in the evening and this was usually the time when Melissa would be having dinner.

At such a time, there should be an aroma wafted from the kitchen from his adorable little lady grilling some steaks or sausages,

boiling potatoes, then sprinkling spices.

According to Joseph, Melissa's cooking skills were very good.

But from the response via his grasp of the aether, there was no one in the kitchen.

Joseph squatted down to pick up a book and his brows creased. A Knight's Righteousness?

He remembered this book. It had been written and published by a former Great Radiant Knight who had a stint as the Combat Branch's Section Chief. However, issues with his combat methods were jointly denounced later on, and he resigned from his post after a short period.

The contents of this book was about his combat methods, which was also the reason he was denounced.

He was a rather new age radical who believed in pragmatism and was a staunch advocate against the rigid knightly combat style that preached a strong faith to the Sacred Light Above could overcome all.

— Indeed, this was the reasoning behind his style of backstabbing, rolling about, and using throwing knives.

Before Joseph retired, he held quite a bit of disdain towards this fellow.

However, now, it did seem to have its merits.

He then picked up a few other books. These were all sorts of textbooks on knight fundamentals that were frequently used by the training department.

These were all very basic but useful knight skills that all novices needed to learn.

However, as the daughter of a Great Radiant Knight, Melissa had received one-to-one tutoring from her father and these books had become more like decorative ornaments.

However, these books had all been taken off from the shelves and strewn all around.

A slight suspicion crept in and Joseph strode towards his study and opened the door.

“Melissa——”

He spotted his beloved red-haired daughter seated behind the desk, with her glasses on and flipping through pages attentively and rapidly.

There were piles of books all over the desk as well as on the floor. The entire study seemed to have become an ocean of books.

The door being opened had knocked a stack of books all over the floor.

“Melissa... What are you doing?”

Joseph stepped over the piles of books, took a quick look around before turning his puzzled gaze onto his daughter.

“Studying,” replied Melissa without batting an eyelid.

A string of question marks popped up in Joseph’s mind.

He walked over to the desk and picked up a book. “Hey, my dear Melissa. If I remember right, haven’t you been telling me since you were four that you hated studying the most?”

Melissa turned another page and her eyes cycled left and right continuously. “I was wrong. I was too naive then and hadn’t understood the meaning of studying. And also because of the limitations of my innate talent, I hadn’t realized the joy of learning yet.”

Joseph placed the book down and reached out to feel Melissa’s forehead. “Are you running a fever?”

“No, I’m perfectly fine. I’ve never been more clear-headed in my life.”

Melissa's glasses glinted in the light. "I truly came to realize how weak and ignorant I was. In the past, I was just muddling through with a low efficiency of studying and took many wrong turns. Being only on the fringes of Destructive-rank is really much too great of a failure."

Joseph's mouth gaped, and he vaguely suspected his headstrong and lovable daughter had been stolen and replaced with someone else.

Before he could question, Melissa looked up and said, "I'm implying about you. Your teaching methods are far too uncivilized and entirely relying on your past experiences. It's just unsuitable.

"However, there's no need for you to be too worried. I've already finished reading all the books here and learned everything. I've also almost found a most suitable path. It isn't too late for me to start over from scratch."

"Wait... All?"

"All."

Joseph slightly paled and felt that there was something a little off with Melissa. Glancing at the numerous books, he asked, "How long did you spend reading all these?!"

"Oh, three days of borrowing books, and... a day to read them."

Joseph went forward and removed Melissa's glasses, scrutinizing her haggard face, bloodshot eyes, and dark eye circles.

"Dad? What are you doing..." groaned Melissa disgruntledly.

She had merely made a move to stand up when she felt a wave of dizziness and aching sweep over her.

Melissa released a muffled "ah" as her vision turned black and she fainted.

Ackerman was once again seated in the office of the Truth Union.

The spacious office was decorated simply but not ordinary. Oil paintings of renown artists hung on the walls and thick rugs padded the floor.

Previously, this was the place Ackerman had taken on the bounty of Destructive-rank Black Magician, 'Faceless Black-scaled Man' Wilde.

At this moment, the Truth Union's Vice-Chairman Andrew sat opposite him.

"Are you saying you wish to forfeit your mission?" asked Andrew calmly.

Chapter 74 Ackerman's Many Tiered Methods

Chapter 74: Ackerman's Many Tiered Methods

Chapter 74: Ackerman's Many Tiered Methods

Ackerman could never get used to the environment in the Truth Union no matter how many times he came.

In a hunter's life, blood, steel, killings, brutality, chaos, and insanity were but some of the aspects. Hunters were just a bunch of beasts in human skin.

During Beast Mutation, they didn't even have any way of retaining their human form and the only thing 'human' that remained was the innermost core.

And the life of hunters was more straightforward and barbaric.

This was practically a complete opposite of the Truth Union who worshiped knowledge and rationality.

This office was located on the upper floors of the Truth Union's general headquarters.

It was clean, neat and mostly comprised of leather and glass. The furnishings were lavish, and the layout was strict to the extremes that not even any superfluous bits existed.

What was most uncomfortable for Ackerman was that there wasn't any smell.

No matter how luxurious the decorations were, it couldn't conceal the icy-cold atmosphere.

It wasn't just the building, but the people within as well.

To be precise, the smell of most members of the Truth Union was

extremely bland and consistent.

They went about their life following rigid schedules and spent everyday in laboratories or classes. Such people rarely did any unnecessary activities and thus, didn't have any other smells polluting them.

Leading a life within such an environment for long periods made them seem to have integrated with the concept of knowledge and made them somewhat empty.

The only thing that remained was the reeking of an icy-cold smell.

The scent of 'desire for knowledge'.

Ackerman didn't disguise himself today. He no longer took the form of an ordinary and tired working class. Instead, he was now a pallid and malicious-looking hunter dressed in black.

He looked to be approximately 20 with a skinny frame and a cold, distant expression. Many people said he was like a bell ringer who waits throughout the night to ring the bell tower at daybreak because he had sufficient patience.

In fact, he did have quite a lot of patience when it came to facing his prey.

The Truth Union Vice-Chairman Andrew sat opposite him. Rumor was it that Andrew was a true maverick within the Truth Union back in his youth due to his charm and skirt-chasing ways.

The most famous episode was the secret relationship with the Iris Clan's elf sage which ultimately fizzled out.

Even though this fellow was now old, those deep-set eye sockets and prominent nose exuded a masculine charm. Dressed in a gentlemanly suit, his ocean-blue eyes were especially mesmerizing.

If Andrew were to appear at a Central District ball organized by high society, it would be highly likely that he would attract many favorable gazes from the ladies.

Andrew fixed a steely gaze on the hunter opposite. Without batting an eyelid, he asked, “If I remember correctly, you were still rather eager to undergo your evaluation for advancement to Destructive-rank.”

Deep down, Andrew was thoroughly surprised and didn’t know what had gone wrong.

In just a mere couple of days, the highly ambitious hunter that had taken up the bounty was now returning back and had chosen to forfeit the mission...

He had believed that the Ackerman back then indeed had been determined and would act swiftly.

But in this short amount of time, wouldn’t it only be enough for the most preliminary of investigations?

From what the Truth Union knew about the situation, Ackerman had already undergone his first round of investigations — ‘Investigate the surroundings of the bookstore, and pay a visit’.

Moreover, they had employed aetheric surveillance equipment but hadn’t detected any large-scale aetheric disturbance.

No, there hadn’t even been any traces, let alone a disturbance.

Based on their observations, the bookstore had been peaceful all this time and it didn’t seem like there had been any clashes there.

That meant to say... Even though it was rather inconceivable, perhaps the hunter opposite him had already chosen to give up even before beginning his operation.

What’s going on?

It can’t be that... he entered the bookstore and had a short chat. And in that span of time, the bookstore owner had purely made him lose his fighting spirit just through words?

That’s just absurd!

Andrew used his own logic to come up with the most rational considerations and felt that there must be some other factor not known to him.

Ackerman nodded and admitted to this point. “That’s right, I was indeed looking forward to the evaluation.”

Andrew frowned but maintained his calm and asked, “Then why are you choosing to give up now? At present, Wilde’s bounty is the easiest amongst all the Destructive-rank bounties... What I mean to say is that if it’s the difficulty of a bounty, this is probably the easiest to claim.”

He then went on. “Moreover, his bounty reward alone is rather high and you did have the necessary resolve and ambition at that time...”

Ackerman looked towards Andrew and interrupted him rudely. “Vice-Chairman Andrew, I don’t think that the Truth Union doesn’t have to launch a full inquiry into why I chose to give up, do they? At the end of the day, this isn’t something of concern to you people nor is there such a rule.

“You seem to be overly anxious,” added Ackerman.

“...” Andrew forced a smile. “This is indeed right. However, in consideration of the safety of Norzin, you should listen. Lately, Norzin hasn’t been all that peaceful— We really hope that someone can help resolve this hidden threat.”

He had made use of a Destructive-rank hunter by banking on Ackerman’s own desire to be the spearhead in the Truth Union’s investigation of an S-rank zone.

However, Ackerman’s decision to just give up made the situation somewhat awkward.

Ackerman now held the initiative and it would seem as if Andrew had some other motive if he tried to continuously convince him otherwise.

He could only quell the frustration in his heart and hold back his

words.

“Then, I’m really sorry. I don’t have much interest in safeguarding the public. This is merely in my own personal interests.”

Ackerman continued calmly. “I think that Mr. Andrew should have detailed information on me, or should I say, you should be very familiar with us hunters. We only pursue prey of value, and are egoistic beasts who seek advantages and avoid troubles.”

He was way sharper than Andrew could imagine. Even though a hunter’s life was filled with much killing, it wasn’t just limited to that.

Moreover, he was an expert at disguise.

Ackerman scoffed inwardly.

He wished for hunters to establish their own organization. From certain angles, it would mean that they would be an enemy of the Truth Union.

These bunch of haughty fellows still do not know how powerful the bookstore owner is exactly. And the owner seems content to wait idly for opportunities, so I’ll just let them continue being in the dark.

Andrew’s heart skipped a beat. Seek advantages and avoid trouble? Who does he mean by trouble?

He had a feeling Ackerman didn’t mean Wilde but someone else instead.

And if it isn’t the bookstore owner, then he can only be implying about our Truth Union... Could he have realized it?

But this doesn’t make sense. His attitude has undergone a complete turnaround just after a mere visit to the bookstore.

Wait a moment, the bookstore?

Could it be that Ackerman found out something via the bookstore

owner? This means that there's a possibility of the bookstore owner instigating him in the short span of a conversation.

However, even though Andrew's heart was filled with doubts, he couldn't continue pressing for answers. He took a deep breath and maintained his graceful smile with a tinge of frigid irony. "Since you insist, I won't persuade you otherwise. Aside from that— The news of you accepting this bounty was made public as it was meant to be your evaluation. Therefore, news of your forfeit will also be made public. Do you have any objections?"

Feigning a retreat to advance? Now you are trying to threaten me with my reputation?

Heh, little does he know that a bad reputation still beats having no reputation in our scattered hunter community.

Ackerman's reputation a Pandemonium-rank hunter was rather obscure.

Now his new goal of wanting to unite hunters would require a way of promoting himself.

The Truth Union is really doing me a huge favor, haa...

Ackerman nearly chuckled out loud. He gritted his teeth and feigned a look of displeasure as he stood up. "Of course not."

And he strode out of the office, leaving a gust of wind behind him.

Andrew remained in the same spot, his smile gradually vanishing.

He stared at the empty office and his brows creased.

After a long while, he eventually fished out his communications device and made a call to Secret Rite Tower's Intelligence Branch.

If the bookstore owner had indeed seen through them exploiting Ackerman to sound out the bookstore, and then countered by making Ackerman give up his mission, then wasn't he helping Wilde in the end?

And if according to the previous information that he was ‘friendly’ and liked helping others ‘blindly’, shouldn’t he have just helped Ackerman accomplish his mission?

But now, besides not lending any help, the bookstore owner had even made Ackerman harm his own reputation—This was something the bookstore owner could easily foresee given his ability.

So how could Andrew not suspect that the bookstore owner’s stance was somewhat partial towards Wilde?

“Hello?”

The one answering wasn’t Joseph, but Andrew recognized him as Joseph’s disciple, a knight by the name of Claude.

“Oh, Truth Union, Vice-Chairman Andrew, how may I help you?”

“Where is Joseph?” muttered Andrew.

“Teacher has requested leave to return home. You can let me know of any requests. I am temporarily in charge of the Intelligence Department.”

“Do you have the most complete file of S-Rank Zone 0113?”

“Ah, what a coincidence. This file has been recently updated, but cough, cough— you do know that for information, it is more valuable the more recent it is...”

Claude still had a slight look of guilt on his face as he said that.

He still couldn’t bring himself to request for additional means of funding with a straight-laced face like his teacher.

As if everything was normal, Andrew replied without any hesitation. “How much?”

How many times has he been conned by Teacher!

Claude was flabbergasted and choked in a fluster. “Uh, please wait

for a minute...”

He brought up the ‘price list’ that Joseph had already prepared beforehand. However, at this moment, the computer beside him beeped with a notification. Claude turned over and discovered that it was a message sent by Joseph.

“Change File 0113’s status to sealed and trash the previous price list. Do not sell it.”

“Sorry...” Claude’s attention returned to the call. “Mr. Andrew, this case file isn’t for sale.”

Chapter 75 Wish You Success In Your Operation

Chapter 75: Wish You Success In Your Operation

Andrew momentarily froze up.

For a moment, he even started to doubt if he had heard it correctly.

Secret Rite Tower and the Truth Union had collaborated for a long time because the ranking list needed updating and refreshing each year. This never changed even if there were S-rank case files.

Although they were just a few S-ranks, whatever changes generally wouldn't be large.

Moreover, Andrew was too lazy to even feign hesitation this time and made the call without any intention of haggling. Secret Rite Tower had no reason to reject this transaction either.

However, the reality was that he had been rejected.

The youngster on the other end of the screen had clearly said, "This case file is not for sale."

But what puzzled and enraged Andrew was that three seconds ago, Claude had been seemingly about to haggle for a good price, like Joseph normally did.

It meant that in the span of three seconds, this case file went from being purchasable to becoming unavailable for sale.

Was this even reasonable?

Andrew's face darkened. There was definitely a factor during those three seconds that had made this youngster change his tune.

At this sort of time, there was one person who could give Claude an order he would comply without hesitation.

The Intelligence Branch Section Chief who had requested for leave and left his disciple in temporary charge—Abraham Joseph.

“Huu...”

Andrew exhaled sharply and uttered, “Let me speak with Joseph.”

Claude wasn’t surprised that Andrew managed to guess the truth in such a short time. After all, the change had been sudden and he was only listening to Joseph’s orders.

But...

He shot a glance at the newly received message.

“I’m extremely sorry, Mr. Andrew. Teacher has some urgent matters to attend to right now and can’t have a call with you right away.”

Claude then added on, “You can ask me directly if you have any queries. I will definitely try my best to help answer, uh... give a reasonable explanation.”

“Oh?” Andrew leaned back into the sofa. With an icy expression, he said, “So Claude, could you explain to me why this case file is no longer for sale all of a sudden?”

Claude cleared his throat and answered with full politeness. “It’s like this. This was all due to my carelessness. The classification of S-rank Zone 0113’s file has been changed from ‘confidential’ to ‘sealed’.

“Even with your authority and preferential treatment, we still aren’t able to sell you a file of this classification. It would be a breach of rules if I were to sell it to you and I would be severely punished for it.

“I’m only taking over Teacher’s job temporarily and ensuring the Intelligence Branch operates as normal. I’m still not familiarized with these matters and can only offer my sincerest apologies for this slip-up. Fortunately, this happened before we made a transaction so it didn’t result in any dire consequences. As for Teacher’s affairs, I really am not too sure with regard to that.

“If it is indeed necessary, you can wait till Teacher finishes handling his matters and speak to him personally, or you can speak with the elders directly.”

Claude had used the ‘I’m just a temporary worker’ excuse to express that his hands were tied and recommended Andrew to speak to relevant supervisors instead.

Andrew’s expression got uglier, but even though he was now gritting his teeth, there was nothing that could be done.

Because, if what Claude had said was true, Secret Rite Tower was just handling the matter as per regulations.

But Andrew had no idea why this attitude didn’t quell the age in him and instead fueled the rage. All he felt was as if he had been toyed with.

Now, the most important question was why this case file had been suddenly changed to a sealed classification.

Andrew put a calm smile back on. “It’s been less than a month. Why was the classified status raised? In any case, this is still the same case, right? The subject is still that bookstore and the owner’s alignment, and the motives are still currently being investigated. What reason is there for you all to decline handing this information over to the Truth Union?

“Or have you all been led astray by the bookstore owner...”

Claude interrupted, “I’m sorry—”

A vein bulged on his temple as he felt increasingly irritated by these two words. Staring at the communication device in his hand, he asked slowly, “What is it this time?”

“It isn’t just one case file.

“What I’m saying is... I’ll have to explain it to you. After detailed and supplementary investigations, File 0113 has already expanded into File 0114. File 0113 is merely a report on the area, whereas File 0113 is a personnel profile. The two of them are classified as

sealed.

“As for your other query, the elders have already dispatched a professional assessor and her evaluation is identical to Joseph’s. The bookstore owner is indeed friendly and has no clear-cut motives, but it doesn’t mean that he does not have any. However, from what we know of the situation, he doesn’t have any inclination to evil so there isn’t a need to fuss over it.”

Claude didn’t forget to add on an extra line after he finished saying all that. “All this is other information and not the main contents of the file.”

Andrew scoffed, “Ridiculous! Does having no evil tendencies now mean he doesn’t have them? If this is the way Secret Rite Tower handles their affairs, then I am extremely disappointed. Your suggestion is not bad indeed. I will need to have a good chat with the three elders soon...”

Claude heaved a sigh of relief upon hearing that and nodded gleefully. “It’s great that you are able to understand. I hope you can have a good talk with the elders.”

Andrew nearly choked up. For a moment, he couldn’t distinguish whether Claude really meant it.

Noticing Vice-Chairman Andrew’s silence, Claude probed, “Do you still have any other questions?”

Andrew calmed himself down. He had nearly been taken for a ride. With an intent gaze, he muttered, “This still isn’t enough. You still haven’t told me why this was suddenly raised to a sealed status.”

“This matter is really beyond my jurisdiction and I do not know anything nor have seniority to change the level of classification. Didn’t you decide to have a chat with the elders, Mr. Andrew? I believe that it would be more efficient than having this talk with me.”

Goddamn it! This teacher-student pair are just equally as slick and crafty!

Having been in a deadlock for quite some time, Andrew gritted his teeth and uttered, “Alright then, I will personally investigate this bookstore.”

“That’s great! I wish you success in your operation! It’s said that the bookstore owner is not only friendly, but is very willing to help with the problems of others. I hope you will have a pleasant visit...”

Baam!

The communications device was shut off.

Andrew sat alone in the office for quite a long while, staring at the heavy rain peppering the windows. He reached out for the decanter of red wine on the table and poured himself a glass.

“Haa... Personally? I really shouldn’t have said that in a pique of rage. The curiosity of those ‘truth seeking’ scholars can be put to use here though...”

Chapter 76 Good Firewood

Chapter 76: Good Firewood

Heris pressed his hand against the window, watching the hunters beneath transport corpses hurriedly.

A putrid stench of rotting had taken hold of this cramped space.

Greenish water flowed along the channels at the edges, carrying carcasses of rats, bones, blood, and other indeterminable matter.

Blood-stains and bits of body parts were strewn all over the ground. Hunters were busy going through these, tossing out the rotted bits into the sewers and feeding the bits that were still fresh to the hounds.

The hounds growled and howled as they feasted, creating sickening crunches as they bit through bone.

These hounds that fed on human flesh had blood-colored eyes and rows of jagged teeth with a sticky drool dripping from them continuously. Besides that, the odor from that was absolutely dreadful.

The hunters that still remained here—the ones feeding the hounds—were already no different from beasts at this moment.

Having injected themselves with sordid blood far exceeding the thresholds, they now relied on the methods of Scarlet Cult's black magicians to keep them awake.

Their bodies and minds were already twisted together. Beneath the wrapped bandages were tufts of coarse fur and beastly appendages. Their beast eyes were clouded yellow and their sanity could be lost at any moment.

In a sense, there were no longer any more humans here.

In the incubator above, the originally gem-like Magic Ovum Mirror

had already become a crystal flower with a sleek mirrored core. And surrounding the crystal were lumps of swollen flesh that were expanding outwards.

Beneath the incubator was a huge ‘altar’. A blood-covered array that burned away life force as fuel was painted on the ground beneath and this was where all the corpses were being handled.

This ‘altar’ was like a massive bonfire, burning vigorously with humans as fuel...

All till enough energy was provided for the incubation of the Magic Ovum Mirror.

“Soon... Soon...”

Heris muttered obsessively as he gazed at the incubator suspended in midair.

He could already sense the continuous ripples of aether emanating from the Magic Ovum Mirror expanding outwards, colliding with the array all around and converging. The entire space trembled slightly, just like... a heart beating.

“How beautiful. Just a bit longer and ‘he’ will descend.”

Heris glanced upwards and his gaze reflected icy rancor as he stared at the thick cement roof.

Above it was the surface of Norzin.

Those knights of Secret Rite Tower were still pursuing them relentlessly.

Ever since Morphey’s death, White Wolf and Scarlet Cult’s situation had taken a drastic turn for the worst.

At first, they could rely on their knowledge of Norzin’s structure. But following Secret Rite Tower’s highly efficient operations, it seemed as though the rug was pulled from under them and they were now in their final struggles.

White Wolf had no choice but to scatter and flee underground like true sewer rats.

However, the situation of White Wolf's hunters was still more optimistic than Scarlet Cult's black magicians.

The group of black magicians weren't truly a cult and merely had a common interest in their 'worship of blood'. However, with Morpheus's power and leadership, they hadn't been any different from a cult.

Their nucleus had indeed been Morpheus.

And now that Morpheus was dead, the most important psychological pillar had instantly crumbled. Such a blow had severely weakened this impressive group of black magicians to the point that they were now inferior to even White Wolf.

"But no matter what it is, these black magicians are indeed really useful fuel..." muttered Heris to himself as he watched a hunter toss a black magician's corpse onto the 'altar'.

Boom! Aether exploded and the array set on the flow emanated a cryptic glow.

As if firewood was added into a bonfire, the formless aether crackled, burning up both 'soul' and flesh of the corpses and turning them into ashes bit by bit.

Lumps of bloody flesh started to grow around the Magic Ovum Mirror above, sticking onto the incubator and climbing upwards.

That crystal flower had started to grow and one of the 'petals' gradually unfurled with a crisp crack.

Heris really wanted to laugh out loud. These black magicians of Scarlet Cult were like a bunch of headless chickens. With a few words, Heris had stirred them up and used them as shields against Secret Rite Tower's manhunt.

They had crumbled instantly.

Fear resulted in the necessity of a new pillar and thus, White Wolf that still seemed to have some leeway in the struggle against Secret Rite Tower had become their last hope.

Unfortunately, they didn't know that this decision had caused them to fall into the hunters' meticulously planned trap.

"The incubation progress has been hastened twofold thanks to all these good quality firewood."

Black magicians had a close connection to the aether in order to use magic and their bodies were the best aetheric vessels. Thus, they were the next best option in this ritual.

Heris didn't know why this mysterious person with snake-like eyes was helping him.

However, they were clutching at straws and didn't have any other choice.

This ritual was far more effective than them directly employing methods to harness life-force. Moreover, their maps of Norzin's layout had also been supplied by this mysterious person.

The mysterious man's words still seemed to ring in Heris' ears. "Burn, burn as much as you like. Fresh blood and vitality are the best nutrients. You will bring them nightmares and pain..."

Thus, Heris set the Scarlet Cult on fire and created panic in Norzin.

But... it still wasn't enough.

"Sir Heris, we have already finished using up the corpses of the black magicians." A subordinate reported. "Do we still continue hunting? There aren't many Scarlet Cult members remaining and they have already fled. It wouldn't be easy to capture them and it might be considered a rather great risk for us."

Scarlet Cult only had that many magicians and in just the span of a few days, they had all become nutrients.

Heris turned around, pressed his hands on the subordinate's

shoulders, and said warmly. “No need. In a bit, you all no longer have to remained worried and on the edge.”

At this moment, another subordinate walked in abruptly. This was a hunter that had practically fully mutated into a beast. His 2.5-meter-tall frame was covered with fur and he was dragging a corpse which he tossed to the floor.

“Spider... have found us... Our 52nd Avenue... It’s not very... far... from here...” The hunter panted.

Spider. That was the new hunter group led by Ji Zhixiu which had splintered off from White Wolf.

Heris replied calmly, “Ji Zhixiu... She’s really even more disgusting than those Secret Rite Tower knights. If even 52nd Avenue was discovered, this place is no longer safe.

“Since that’s the case... Let them come. It’s about time this hideout got destroyed.”

Heris glanced down and stepped on the head of the corpse beneath him. In an instant, he transformed into a massive white wolf standing on its hind legs and laughed maniacally. “It just so happens that these little spiders would make good firewood as well.”

Chapter 77 Time To Sleep

Chapter 77: Time To Sleep

52nd Avenue.

Boom!

An explosion rang out, and the sounds of a building collapsing echoed soon after.

Under the gloomy downpour, this street that had already been evacuated was suddenly covered with blazes in the blink of an eye.

Swish!

The shadows of hunters flitted through the rain.

Following another explosion, the ground littered with cracks in the middle of the street caved in, forming a massive crater.

The accumulated water on the cement ground flowed into the crater like a waterfall.

A portion of Norzin's underground sewerage system was exposed.

As Norzin's Upper District was entirely constructed of metal and didn't have soil nor vegetation to absorb rain, severe water-logging would occur whenever Norzin encountered such extreme weather.

Thus, an extensive and reliable sewer system was necessary for the city's plans.

But before actually seeing this huge underground passage for themselves, most people wouldn't be able to imagine that there was actually such a massive secret space beneath Norzin.

Of course, this part was clearly a spot where water converged and most areas of the sewers wouldn't be this wide.

And beneath this was an unimaginable and hellish scene.

A mountain of numerous corpses and dismembered limbs, blood, and pus floating on greenish sewage water. All of this was washed away by the torrent of floodwater that gushed down.

“Are these White Wolf people insane?!”

Ji Zhixiu inhaled sharply as a chill ran down her spine.

Despite her many years of being a hunter, experiencing countless killings, and getting used to witnessing death, she had never encountered a scene as horrific as this.

This was of a whole new level.

Prior to this, she knew of White Wolf’s wicked ways including widespread killing. However, she hadn’t known that they were actually accumulating corpses here, like a slaughterhouse.

From the situation here, it was clear that this activity had already lasted for quite a while.

And this place... was probably just one of their hideouts.

The hunters guarding here had already started engaging in combat with them. Those things that were no longer human released beastly howls as they fought with claws and teeth.

Ji Zhixiu suddenly had a premonition of danger and immediately made a few quick hops to the side, dodging a crossbow bolt that came hurtling.

This bolt was the thick sort used to siege city walls. It embedded deeply into the ground and it was easy to imagine the damage it could do to a human body.

And as it blitzed past, a flash of an inscription on it revealed that this crossbow bolt wasn’t ordinary.

A white magician’s Lightning-Tempest sigil!

Ji Zhixiu's eyes contracted and she immediately did a roll to the side. "Watch out!"

"Run!"

Bzzt bzzt—

The sigil lit up with fine streaks of electricity.

Crack!

A bolt of lightning descended from the heavens, striking the bolt and immediately splitting into many forks.

In that instant, luminescent lightning shot in all directions and covered the entire area in electricity.

The hunters that were struck couldn't even wail as they were fried to a crisp, falling to the ground and turning into ashes.

On the ground of the underground chamber that had been washed by water, a distinct array gradually revealed itself.

As these people died, the array glowed an ominous scarlet that got brighter and brighter...

"Damn it!"

Ji Zhixiu's body had been thrown to the ground. As she got up, she drew her cane-blade, noticing a tall middle-aged man in a black windbreaker standing on the roof of a distant building as she looked up.

"Heris!"

"Long time no see Lady Ji, it seems like you've gotten even stronger," said Heris nonchalantly.

He then leaped straight off the roof and landed on the ground with a loud crash.

"You have really great luck. Is that the power accorded to you by

the bookstore owner? A pity though. If not for the circumstances forbidding me, I would like to pay him a visit too..."

He started walking towards Ji Zhixiu, transforming into Beast Mutation with each step. The gaze in his eyes was full of icy malevolence.

"However, it no longer matters. I don't think he would have any means of helping you now, would he?"

Out of nowhere, more White Wolf hunters started appearing on roofs, the street, and within buildings in numbers.

Their eyes glowed in the dark rain, like a hungry pack of wolves.

Concentrated doses of sordid blood had given them many times more power than they originally had.

And the pain and delusions of their impending demise gave them an incomparable will. Unless incapacitated, they were killing machines of the highest efficiency.

Ji Zhixiu scoffed in derision. "Don't tell me you gather all your remaining forces just to do with us? I'm really honored.

"After all, even Secret Rite Tower wasn't accorded such treatment. You must really respect our little hunter group that hasn't even been established for more than a month."

Inwardly, she sneered at how White Wolf didn't dare face Secret Rite Tower head-on and hid away in the shadows, yet had gathered in numbers to deal with their new and scattered little hunter group.

A typical case of fearing the strong and preying on the weak.

But in reality, despite Ji Zhixiu's outer expression, she was feeling a little worried.

She was confident of holding her own against Heris, however, her hunters who had just recently gotten the way of 'maintaining rationality in Beast Mutation form' didn't have enough strength to deal with those White Wolf members that had raised their strength

through extreme dosages of sordid blood.

This time around, their opponents coming out in strength probably meant that they were desperate and didn't even care about Secret Rite Tower anymore.

Their goal was to drag more people down as sacrifices with them before dying.

Perhaps, this was the final goal of the entire Magic Ovum Mirror incident.

This, too, was also the endpoint of Ji Zhixiu's quest for revenge.

Ji Zhixiu transformed into a giant silver-furred wolf. Standing erect, she snarled, her claws carving out deep marks on the ground.

She leaped up with a 'whoosh', traversing through space and appearing behind Heris' back. Her jaws lunged at Heris' spine, drawing a spray of blood as her sharp teeth crushed through bone.

This was a dogfight between beasts, with tooth for tooth and blood for blood.

And in the various underground passages under Norzin, those hunter beast aberrations that had already lost their sanity heard the command to head to the 'altar'.

Boom!

A vague heartbeat echoed beneath the ground of Norzin's Upper District, resonating with the thunderclaps from the sky.

Lin Jie heard the rumble of thunder from outside and turned to look. Streaks of lightning split the dark skies continuously like tree branches reaching down from the heavens.

"This horrendous Norzin weather is really getting worse by the day."

He frowned and drew the blinds down.

Though simple, the bedroom lights were bright. But the familiarity of living here for three years made him feel a sense of comfort.

The only difference was the long sword on his desk.

Lin Jie didn't feel at ease leaving such an expensive object lying around and thus brought it to the bedroom.

"Let's just pretend it wards off evil spirits," mumbled Lin Jie to himself.

"I'll buy a sword display rack and store it properly some other day."

It was already 10 at night. Lin Jie glanced at his watch and climbed into bed, gazing at the beautiful dream-catcher above.

Chapter 78 Second Dream Realm

Chapter 78: Second Dream Realm

What lay before Lin Jie's eyes was a vast expanse of scorched earth.

Blackened ground for as far as eyes could see, covered with fractures that had lava flowing through them slowly. A faint twinkling red glow was largely covered by dark clouds, as lightning danced all around.

Partially collapsed ruins still stood several hundreds of meters high and the entire range was impossible to determine. Remnants of this building still retained a hint of its former glory on this land, like a massive, injured beast that was still breathing.

Standing beneath and looking up allowed one to clearly realize one's own insignificance.

And in the distant horizon was a gray fog that seemed to be joined together with the sky. This fog seemed alive, twisting and turning continuously and vaguely contorting into some sort of strange form.

Lin Jie could even vaguely hear the howling of wind coming from this fog.

"What's up this time round? An RPG? Or a boss battle?" mused Lin Jie as he surveyed the surroundings.

According to Freud's Interpretation of Dreams which he had previously read, dreams were an embodiment of one's subconscious desires.

Lin Jie wondered if it was because he hadn't played video games for so long ever since transmigrating here that such a desire had started to take shape in his dreams.

Even if that was really the case, Lin Jie's hands were tied. It wasn't a question of whether he could game or not, but the hardware restrictions of Norzin's gaming industry were so backward that Lin Jie would thank the heavens if he could have an NES to play with.

Lin Jie sighed and kept his wandering thoughts in check before continuing to survey the surroundings.

Now that he thought about it, it seemed likely that a symphonic BGM could sound shortly, announcing the appearance of a massive and flashy BOSS.

He walked over to a damaged pillar and reached his hand out to pick up a piece of a stone fragment.

This fragment had an extraordinary luster-pure white marble with a beautiful motif inscribed on it.

From this fragmented piece as well as the grand ruins all around, it was easy to surmise how this place was like in the past.

"Hmm... the style and manner of this motif just seems somewhat familiar."

Lin Jie squinted, wiping away dirt and stains to have a better look at the design.

An instinctive intuition and years of experience made him instantly determine—

The sword Joseph gave me!

The two motifs weren't exactly the same. The carvings on this fragmented piece wasn't whole and most people wouldn't feel that both were equally as gorgeous but be unable to tell the difference.

However, Lin Jie was a professional.

Folklore art and structures were part of his research scope. Both of these were important parts of folklore studies.

During on-site research, some bizarre, native artifacts might not be

preserved completely so restoration and cleaning up might be required.

Speaking of which, due to folk culture research having many different overlapping aspects and facets, Lin Jie would at times be dragged along to sites by the archaeology major next door.

He was rather sensitive to the styles of these motifs and practically found similarities in the styles and art of these two pieces in an instant. Thus, he could determine that the motifs on the sword and this stone piece were of the same origin.

Moreover, before Lin Jie had slept, he had browsed the sword out of curiosity and even went over the inscribed patterns. Therefore, the impression he had was rather deep.

“Looks like it really is my subconscious at work, bringing recent experiences into my dreams.”

Lin Jie frowned, put down the stone piece, and continued walking into the heart of the ruins.

The way in which these ruins collapsed seemed to follow a set pattern, like a bunch of dominoes. The buildings fell outwards in a circular manner which meant that there was a clear epicenter.

Lin Jie tried investigating but the damage to this expanse of ruins was unimaginable and it was difficult to pass through.

These scorched constructs basically crumbled upon touch.

Lin Jie even used a little too much force one time and an entire section of building came crashing down with a rumble and turning into dust.

The feeling of destruction actually gave Lin Jie a slight thrill and he even had the urge to try it once more.

“This dream seems a total opposite of the previous. The map has also gotten bigger but it’s still very interesting... and unimaginably realistic.”

As he watched the dust rise, Lin Jie rubbed his chin and mused, “Haa... I can only experience a VR RPG scene in my dreams. It’s better than nothing, I guess.”

However, Lin Jie’s exploration wasn’t fruitless. Soon after, he found quite a number of corpses amongst the ruins.

Although most of these corpses had already melded in together with the ruins, there were still a few that were relatively complete.

Lin Jie squatted down to study a twisted body lying in the corner, his gaze concentrating on the ears of this corpse.

Hmm... I don’t think I’m mistaken but the ears of this corpse seem unusually long.

Calmly, Lin Jie flipped over the body.

“Mm... It’s clear from the front that these ears aren’t of a normal length.”

Lin Jie reached out to touch the corpse’s ear and was surprised to find that it was still a little soft. There was normal cartilage within the center of the ear, and it was joined to the head and not an ornamental.

That meant to say that its physiological structure was just like this.

An elf?

Lin Jie recalled a recent customer, the beautiful elf cosplayer lady.

He stood up and clapped the dirt off his hands while muttering, “Looks like this dream is indeed a mishmash of my subconscious.”

It seemed like recent considerations had already gotten mixed up in his dream.

Besides that, Lin Jie also discovered many weapons within the ruins which reminded him of the craftsmanship of Joseph’s sword.

He sensed that there was an exceptional connection between these

objects, and it reminded him of a time when he headed down to a certain remote village for research. Thus, Lin Jie decided to try remembering how these objects looked and jotting them down when he woke up. Perhaps, he would be able to gain some inspiration towards helping the Iris Clan restore the significance of their history.

After passing through many mounds of rubble and standing atop a collapsed flight of marble steps, Lin Jie finally saw the epicenter of the ruins.

It was a huge but badly damaged terrace with fine golden lines on its fringes. Blackened stone or corpses lay all around and the huge golden dome above was split in two, with the remaining half stuck in the ground.

In the center, a tall person in a suit of armor was kneeling down.

A long sword was sticking out of his chest as if it were a stake, wedging him to the ground.

Flowing, golden hair from his head reached all the way to the ground and it shimmered in the light. An elegant, yet streamline armor revealed his tall, robust body and a laurel wreath atop his head drew attention to his long, pointy ears.

On this terrace, the hands of this kneeling person were grasped around the hilt of the sword that pierced his own heart, as if he had been trying to atone for his sins.

As Lin Jie's footsteps echoed in this quiet place, that person suddenly raised his head and gasped.

"Savior, my banished soul has been waiting here for many eons."

Chapter 79 Candela

Chapter 79: Candela

Lin Jie had just passed the displaced staircase and stood on the platform when he heard such a line.

His lips twitched. Is this really a character playing a role?

However, this wasn't the 'final boss appearing' scene he imagined, but a 'CG cut-scene where an important NPC introduced a new gamer to the story line' instead.

The 'savior' appellation was a really typical formula.

In traditional role-playing games, ten out of ten player characters were saviors.

But upon further thought, there wouldn't be too much innovation in his dream given his somewhat lacking gaming experience.

Lin Jie's gaze fell onto the 'NPC' that had just said his lines.

This was an extremely accurate depiction of a male elf.

Flowing golden hair and olive green eyes complemented the pretty face that even made it difficult to determine the gender. His neutral beauty was astounding, but at the same time, it contained a certain sharpness that didn't make him seem overly gentle.

Combining the scene with the lines of this 'NPC' and his dialog, Lin Jie roughly surmised the plot.

Surely, a great catastrophe had occurred here and this elf here was either the culprit or was someone who lacked the ability to stop this tragedy.

And as he awoke after everyone else died, this NPC was filled with guilt and thus chose to either kill himself or something along the lines of sealing himself.

Up till the power of a person who could save the world or correct his mistake appeared.

After witnessing this scene, Lin Jie felt certain that he had gotten the rough idea of this story-line.

Lin Jie circled around the elf and suddenly discovered that the blade stuck in his chest was the sword which Joseph had gifted.

This was the irrefutable proof that dreams at night were made up of thoughts in the day.

Lin Jie had been studying that sword in the day and now it had started weaving a story in his dream.

The elf watched Lin Jie calmly, waiting for Lin Jie to complete his round before speaking, "On behalf of the kingdom, I must thank you for restoring the luster of the sacred sword. This is the third of my unforgivable sins."

Sacred sword... It's probably the one stuck in his body and also the sword given by Joseph.

Previously, he had wondered why the sword was a little 'dirty' but afterwards discovered that the black marks disappeared when viewing it from another angle. This was probably a certain type of special craftsmanship but it seemed like it had become a merit in Lin Jie's dream.

No wonder it was a dream. Lin Jie's casual thoughts ended up being a feather in his cap here.

However, from the latest line, it seems that this elf character was the likely cause of this great catastrophe and was now punishing himself.

"You're welcome."

Lin Jie lapped up the credit with a straight face. He then squatted down, meeting the elf's eye level and asked with interest, "Since you mentioned that this was the third, could you tell me about the other sins? I really wish to hear your story."

It just so happened that Lin Jie hadn't seen any customer besides Joseph recently, so giving this 'friend' some counsel seemed like a decent choice.

Generally speaking, characters harboring great bitterness tended to be lonely. Lack of interaction would also add to their psychological burden and such characters actually yearned to speak about their own suffering.

This was also why villainous characters tended to always have a strong desire to express themselves and have a glorious monologue just as their plans were about to be completed.

On one hand, this was just one reason. On the other hand... this was also because certain scriptwriters had to reveal the truth as well as give the main character time to counterattack.

Getting him to speak wasn't rubbing salt in the wounds, but giving this character a means to vent.

Moreover, since he had mentioned his own sins in the first place, it was clear that this elf character really wished to talk.

"It would be my honor if you are willing to hear the confession of a sinner."

The elf gave a slight smile, lowering his head humbly and said softly, "Many thousands of years ago, in a time without light and fire, I was egotistical and attempted to kill a god to expand the land for my people. Eventually, upon looking straight at the god, I sunk into madness. This is my sin of cowardice.

"I was their king, yet slaughtered my own people, nearly wiping them out as I descended into madness, ruining everything the kingdom had with my own hands. This is my sin of betrayal.

"The sacred sword was stained with the blood of my people. With it, I sealed my own filthy soul, making it lose its brilliance and tarnishing the kingdom's last hallowed symbol. This is my sin of ignorance.

"I brought the kingdom to its apex, then destroyed it in person.

Many thousands of years later, the crown has become my shackle. People call me ‘The Exile’ Candela.”

Lin Jie stroked his own chin, feeling pleased that his guess had been largely correct.

It’s rather tragic indeed. His attempt to kill the god backfired, driving him insane and even getting his own kingdom destroyed... Moreover, he used the sacred sword to seal himself, seemingly turning himself into some sort of sword spirit entity.

“Why do you call me savior? I didn’t save you, and your kingdom has already been destroyed.” Lin Jie pointed at the sword in his body and looked all around. “Will you be requesting me to do something?”

Immediately, the elf’s expression became even more miserable, as if his inner thoughts had been seen through. “Your benevolence makes me feel thoroughly ashamed. But please calm down, I have never meant to overstep and think that I deserve redemption.”

Like a kid being disciplined by a parent for making an unreasonable request, he trembled while explaining himself, “You have already helped me out a lot. My kingdom has already become a speck of dust in the long annals of history. I no longer have the right to do anything for this land, but no matter how, I have no way of atoning for my sins...”

Lin Jie felt that this fellow had condemned himself incessantly in the many thousands of years he was sealed, leading to a psychological barrier that made anything he hears sound like criticism.

He might look calm and collected on the surface, but any random question could prick him.

“No.” Lin Jie met his gaze, interrupting the elf’s incoherent confession.

“Since you said that you’ve sinned, your unwillingness to atone for it now is self-abandonment and you are just shirking responsibility.

In reality, your actions have no meaning and you are just gutless.”

From the words ‘many thousands of years later,’ Lin Jie surmised that this scene wasn’t real and was possibly the elf’s own mental state or memories.

And his slaughtering nearly all his people meant that it was possible that they weren’t all wiped out.

“Do you know what happened to your kingdom after all that? What about your people that survived? Did they wander around in a miserable plight or perhaps rebuilt a new home elsewhere?

“They are still striving hard even though they are much weaker than you. Meanwhile, you possess great power, yet you are over here moping around without taking any action.

“You are just deceiving yourself and making an excuse so as to not bear the responsibility.

“You have no right? What right? This is a price you should pay for your actions. Suffering in the eyes of everyone should be your punishment and not curling up and moping like you are doing now.”

‘Professional’ talk therapist Lin Jie continued with a chuckle, “You haven’t made any bit of progress in all this time. All you do is flee continuously and wait for forgiveness. You’ve never once thought that during all this time of inaction, the suffering experienced by your people far exceeds your own!

“Think about what you should do properly. Nobody is your savior. Only you can save yourself.”

Candela froze. He was completely stumped by Lin Jie’s words.

Then, his eyes lit up as he gazed at Lin Jie like a child seeing his father. “You are right, but my ignorance is deep-rooted. Without your guidance, I really don’t know what I ought to do... I’m very afraid of making the same mistakes.”

The elf prostrated to the ground, with his forehead in front of Lin

Jie's feet.

"I... wish to become your sword."

Chapter 80 Slaying A God

Chapter 80: Slaying A God

Haa... He probably means for me to give him some guidance and instructions before actually making a move.

Besides that, from the way he is swearing loyalty... Could he be an initial companion granted during the beginner story-line? And giving me the best sword in the village?

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow, quickly taking two steps back and standing up. "You've thought things through? Is this your decision?

"What you truly hope to do isn't something that can be resolved simply by telling me a couple of lines. You have to take action earnestly and atone for all that you have done. None of your people whom you have already forgotten won't forgive you for all the time you have wasted away. If you still intend to maintain that feeble mentality, then it would be best if you continue holing up yourself over here."

These words weren't meant to be a blow to the fellow's self-confidence, but indirectly questioning if he was up to the task.

After all, Lin Jie didn't know how much longer this dream would last, so giving a tragic character some psychological guidance and chicken soup to help him see renewed hope in life didn't seem all that bad.

Lin Jie was simply the light of enlightenment and could feel his entire body radiating with positivity.

Candela stood up once again and muttered gravely, "I understand.

"My soul has long whittled away over the eons. As punishment for my rampage, the madness born of malicious resentment has bound with me and has even become a part of me...

“When that curse dissipated, what remains here is just the last remnants of my soul’s final obsession.

“You are right, I just wanted to use other’s forgiveness as an excuse to escape. I truly no longer have such a right to do something for my kingdom or people, but rather, I no longer have the right to continue on with my cowardice.

“This time, there’s no longer glory, nor the elf king Candela. I’m just... a returning exile.”

The elf’s gaze now had a look of resolve as he gazed at the wide expanse of scorched earth. “Before I completely wither away, I feel that there are some things I ought to do instead of begging in hopes of forgiveness.

“Even if thousands of years pass and my kingdom no longer exists on this land, my people still live on.”

Over thousands of years, giants and elves of the past had already disappeared from history books.

The people murdered by the demon sword were innumerable, and their madness, resentment, and memories had also become intertwined with his soul.

He had witnessed the history of Azir and had seen those two formerly glorious countries eventually become nothing more than folklore.

In this once ruined expanse, humans had built a massive city called ‘Norzin’ which was as prosperous as his own kingdom had once been.

Most elves and other mythical creatures lived in seclusion in the woods, but a small minority hid away in human cities and grew accustomed to such a life.

Even elves who were beings with longevity had already gotten used to clans being the family unit.

The wheels of history never waited and the elf kingdom would

never reappear.

So why not do something useful. This time, he could still use his last remnants of strength to protect his people and their land one final time.

And before quietly wither away, why not ignite all that he had remaining.

Candela looked up at the young man before him and said, “I think there is only one thing I can do.”

Lin Jie shot him a gaze that indicated ‘go on’.

“I beseech you to help give me a last chance to fight for my people one last time. Please take this sword as your weapon and slay the god that will descend from the dream realm.

“Ten thousand years ago, I harbored the desire to slay this god, yet shrank when I came face to face with it. Looking straight at this god made me descend into madness and ultimately led to the tragic plight of the kingdom.

“Ten thousand years later, on this very land, I wish to fulfill this desire, not for myself but for my people that are still living on this land.”

Candela’s eyes glowed in sincerity. “I offer you my absolute fidelity and my most precious tribute in hopes that you will forgive my last overbearing request.”

Is this a quest? But it doesn’t sound like beginner difficulty, huh...

Is this dream messing around? Slaying a god right away?!

Or can this actually be a beginner’s tutorial?

Moreover, Lin Jie didn’t really want to do anything too strenuous in his dreams. After all, this went against the whole concept of ‘sleeping’.

Slightly awkward, he replied, “Wait a minute. To be honest... I’m

not really well-versed in stuff like fighting.”

Even if in a dream, wouldn't he surely be terrible at something he had never done before?

Lin Jie was a proper civilian after all.

Now that he was also a proper bookstore owner and a professional life mentor, Lin Jie had his own image to maintain.

Not being well-versed was one thing, but making a fool of himself was something else. Lin Jie had already dished out some classy and enlightened words to this elf. Thus, if he were to pick up the sword and make a mess, it would be very embarrassing indeed even if he were to somehow win.

That would really ruin the brilliant teacher image he had built.

At this point, Lin Jie felt that there was a slight disadvantage in lucid dreaming. While being conscious of himself dreaming, Lin Jie couldn't consciously go about doing stuff that he wouldn't normally do in reality.

In his previous dream with Silver, being able to produce a book had already been using his limits of imagination.

Candela reached to remove the laurel on his head and said gently, “There's no need to overthink. I will become your strength, your steed, and as I have said before, your sword.”

He lifted the laurel up and handed it to Lin Jie. “Although I am no longer a king, the crown had been on me before I died. Shortly after, the kingdom was destroyed and no one succeeded this crown. It is my most precious treasure, but perhaps it might not be worth much to others. I am giving it to you and laying down all my former glories.”

Lin Jie took the crown made of laurel branches. These branches were sturdy and had a white metallic shine. A white gemstone was inlaid in the center and glowed beautifully.

Before he could get a closer look, this laurel crown turned into a

white light which heated up his wrist and burned a mark around it.

“The crown has already become a portion of my soul. This is an imprint of the elf king and it is the only thing I can give you as thanks,” explained Candela.

Lin Jie rubbed his wrist. It felt like... nothing, just like a tiny weight or something.

“Now...” The elf got up from his prostrating position into a half-kneel. Placing his hands on the sword hilt, he slowly started pulling it out.

There wasn’t any blood nor other tissue. All that was in this elf’s chest was a black hole.

Like a blaze of light, the sword tip illuminated the surrounding darkness.

By the time the sword blade was halfway out, Candela was already standing.

His height was even taller than Lin Jie imagined.

If Lin Jie had reckoned Silver was approximately two meters tall, this elf before him now was at least 2.5 meters.

When the sword was almost out, Candela moved so that the hilt was before Lin Jie.

“Please pull it out—and I will fight for you in the future.”

Lin Jie reached out and clasped the hilt. As he came into contact with the beautiful yet icy motifs, he suddenly saw the tumultuous life of Candela during the time where there was no light and fire.

He held light and fire, as if holding the sun. Going against the current and striking out against a god...

He was the only brave soul.

Chapter 81 Is That The God You Were Talking About?

Chapter 81: Is That The God You Were Talking About?

As Lin Jie came into contact with the cold sword hilt, fragmented images of Candela's life hit him.

His birth, adolescence, youth... a great and magnificent king gradually emerging.

A glorious kingdom, spectacular constructs, beautiful elves clad in white clothes, massive sacred trees, majestic griffins, the respect and adoration of his people, and then fires raging and the endless darkness.

Perhaps because Candela didn't want to reveal the details of him personally destroying his kingdom or due to having already lost his sanity then, the scenes that followed were very fuzzy.

Within his constantly whirling field of view, some strange snippets materialized randomly, as if it were the resentment of people slain by his hand entwined with his soul that Candela had mentioned about.

And when the world stopped spinning, a brilliant flame suddenly erupted in front of Lin Jie.

All of this had flashed by in a mere instance.

Lin Jie blinked and his vision returned to normal.

In his hand was the 'sacred sword' that Candela had pulled out from his chest. The smooth and flat sword blade was like a white flame, illuminating all around it and forming a halo.

Illumination?

Lin Jie looked around him. This was no longer the ruined terrace he

had been on.

His surroundings were covered by a roiling, thick gray fog. The moving fog lit by the glowing halo of the sword made it seem as if there was something alive within it.

And deeper into the fog which wasn't illuminated was an expanse of pitch-black darkness.

In the sky above was a massive fracture and forks of red lightning rippled within the dark clouds.

As if something would appear at any moment.

Lin Jie's eyes followed the sword up towards his hands and finally noticed a difference. These hands were wrapped in some sort of glimmering metallic gauntlets followed by a pair of bracers.

From the look of things, Lin Jie felt that these hands weren't his.

His eyes went further downwards and he noticed the armor on his body was the same one that Candela had been wearing, just that it was even more resplendent, as if it was some sort of illusion.

And when he saw a glimpse of gold from the corner of his eyes as well as a sharp black beak, Lin Jie knew at once that there was a vigilant griffin walking slightly behind him.

At this moment, Lin Jie knew.

Passing through these fragmented scenes, he had arrived in Candela's memories and then became him.

Is this... some sort of alternate dream within a dream?

Fine, it still seems rather reasonable from the dream's angle.

After all, everything that happens in a dream has a possibility of happening, right? At the very least, the story-line up to this point had still been logical.

Since Candela said that he wanted to protect his people once more,

perhaps this is the battlefield or a duplicate of a past scene?

And the atmosphere before him seemed like the moment before a big BOSS appeared.

Lin Jie glanced at the sword in his hand and recalled Candela's words. This elf king possessed great power, yet feared facing the god. Thus, he had beseeched Lin Jie for guidance so as to not make the same mistake and to use this sacred sword to slay another newly appearing god.

Therefore, Lin Jie needed to become Candela's reason and guide. Simply taking control, or putting it in a different way, to steer his soul.

Was this what he meant by 'becoming my steed'?

"Candela?"

Lin Jie suddenly recalled that this elf king was probably serving as some sort of sword spirit within this blade.

"Yes."

Candela's mellow yet graceful voice echoed respectfully.

"Is that the god you were talking about?"

Lin Jie pointed the sword towards the sky as Candela's memory was beginning to stir. The sword tip streaked across the sky, creating an earth-shattering boom.

Rumble...

Ominous rumbling of thunder echoed as lightning instantly lit up the sky full of dark clouds.

From within that massive fracture, an ax extended outwards, held by a scaly hand.

“Haa... Haa...” Ji Zhixiu was panting.

Flowing aether evaporated the rainwater that came close. Ji Zhixiu’s silver fur was fluttering in the wind, making her seem extra menacing.

She maintained her Sky Wolf state, glaring intently at Heris as she bared her fangs.

The rain intensified continuously, drowning out all background noise.

A large portion of the district all around was completely destroyed. Most buildings had collapsed and the previous crater had gotten even larger. A sewer had probably exploded as murky water filled with corpses flowed out rapidly.

As she bled continuously, Ji Zhixiu’s vision had already started to become blurry.

She still wasn’t strong enough indeed.

Hunter corpses strewn all around but they no longer had any semblance to a human. Squirming fur, eyes, and sarcoma had grown all over their bodies.

These were no longer humans but dream beasts.

White Wolf’s last hurrah was astoundingly frenzied. Even Heris, in his massive beast form, had eyes filled with blood-thirst and no longer showed any trace of human consciousness.

They simply didn’t intend to go on living. At this point of no return, they were going all out for revenge.

“Howl!”

Heris howled towards the sky before slamming the ground with his fists and causing the ground surface to crumble.

Smiling maniacally, he casually swept his hand, sending a bunch of hunter corpses into the streaming water below.

Splash!

Ji Zhixiu couldn't help looking down upon hearing the corpses hitting the water. At that moment, she saw a faint whirlpool forming within the turbid water.

An ominous foreboding flitted across her mind.

She shut her eyes and recalled that during the process of this entire battle, Heris hadn't wandered away from this crater all this time. Moreover, during the fight, he had been constantly chucking the corpses of deceased hunters into the hole.

Something's not right! He's doing it on purpose!

They've been intentionally guarding this spot to make us think that it's the incubation ground. But it isn't!

Ji Zhixiu opened her eyes abruptly as a fork of lightning streaked across the sky, illuminating Heris' face.

A satisfied grin showed on that beastly face. "Sufficient offerings at last..."

Heris spread out his arms as a blood-red glow lit up from beneath the flowing water. This light took the shape of an array before becoming a straight beam that shot in a certain direction.

Similar beams of light emerged from four other spots and eventually descended on where the actual incubator was located.

Krrackk... Krrackk...

The incubator gradually fractured and the crystal flower within fully blossomed. A scarlet spot appeared in the glossy mirror-like center before smudging. Following that, the mirror cracked like a shell breaking, revealing a mysterious abyss within.

Boom!

Streams of red lightning blazed up from the ground, splitting the dark, rainy sky in two.

Ji Zhixiu immediately looked up as every single hair on her body stood on end.

Within the dark clouds, a gargantuan humanoid figure stood up slowly as lightning crackled all around its body.

Only

Its giant body the size of a mountain was covered with rubbery scales. Numerous long noses squirmed constantly from the distorted head that wasn't anything human. The sound of its breathing was like thunderclaps through the rows of jagged teeth from its mouth.

Rain falling on its body flowed down like a gushing waterfall.

Heris had a look of feverish zealotry in his eyes as he laughed maniacally and shouted out loud, "Oh god!

"Mighty rain god!

"Rejoice, for he has been born! HAHAAAAHA!"

Chapter 82 Emerging From Legends

Chapter 82: Emerging From Legends

Central District, Truth Union General Office, highest floor conference room.

Everyone stared quietly at the screen as they listened to the cold mechanical voice announcing.

“White 3 Class 4 Weapons Store votes to authorize.”

“White 3 has voted to authorize the Aether Annihilation Cannon.”

“Notion passed.”

“All departments are to return to their posts. The Aether Annihilation Cannon is being readied...”

Ji Zhixiu looked up at the humongous humanoid creature the size of a mountain.

Thunderclouds and lightning shrouded around it, concealing parts of its massive body. Scales all over made some sort of armor, covering a layer of glossy, gluey fluid. In its hands was a black ax as well as a shield.

Further upwards was a squirming mass of noises and a pair of eyes brimming with white electricity.

Such a giant monstrosity was as astounding as the legends told. Even the city beneath its feet seemed tiny and insignificant.

However, this gargantuan monster that ought to immediately catch the attention of the masses in this rain-stricken city didn't trigger any panic at all.

It came with the lightning and opened a door at the same time...

Ji Zhixiu knew this and all other extraordinary beings could sense it.

Because, this place was no longer reality... a fracture of the dream realm had been open and the boundaries between dream and reality had become blurred.

The reason the Magic Ovum Mirror got its name was firstly because of its ability to captivate hearts during its 'infancy'.

All that gazed at it would develop an insatiable desire to possess it and the effect only got stronger the longer the interaction.

It could control other creatures to do everything for itself and source the required nutrients it needed.

In a certain sense, it could be described as a type of magical object.

Therefore, the usual practice when discovering a Magic Ovum Mirror was to destroy it immediately.

One definitely needed to take measures to safeguard oneself should there be a need to utilize it. If not, very few people could recover from its influence.

Secondly, during its 'maturity', which was after it had absorbed sufficient nutrients, a Magic Ovum Mirror would become an 'egg' which dream realm creatures hatched from. Under the right conditions, a creature from the dream realm could use it to arrive in reality.

In other words, the Magic Ovum Mirror was actually a living one-off transportation gate.

During ancient times, magicians treated these objects as the vanguard and sentinels that were deliberately planned by dream realm creatures.

Secret Rite Tower and the Truth Union had acted speedily and had already practically wiped out White Wolf and Scarlet Cult. At first,

they thought that this matter had already been suppressed... In most circumstances, such a short amount of time definitely wouldn't be enough to incubate a Magic Ovum Mirror.

The slaughtering of the populace by White Wolf wasn't enough to furnish the nutrients required to create a sufficiently large dream realm fracture, but nobody knew that they would have just used Scarlet Cult personnel as sacrifices and even their own hunters weren't spared.

Therefore, nobody imagined that a dream realm fracture would be opened abruptly and without warning.

Ji Zhixiu took two deep breaths, slowly backed off, then turned around before darting away to the distance.

Her calm and rationality supported by Steel Resolve quelled her own instinctive fear and trembling.

It made her understand clearly that the best option at this very moment was to flee.

She could go all out with her Destructive-rank power, but the chances of victory were minute. This godly entity that was already radiating a threat level of a Supreme-rank being would be better left for Secret Rite Tower and Truth Union to handle.

Heris' maniacal laughter could be faintly heard from behind her.

Ji Zhixiu glanced back and saw Heris tottering forward in the rising water towards the godly being in the rain.

A few steps later, he raised his hands high, babbling something incoherent. There was a strange glint in his eyes as warts grew rapidly on his body before bursting into distorted limbs and ripping his body apart.

Yet another few steps later, Heris' staggering stopped and he fell face-first into the water with a splash. In the next second, there was no longer any trace of him.

He had slain all of Scarlet Cult's black magicians, massacred

thousands of civilians in the shadows, and sacrificed White Wolf whom he had painstakingly built over decades in exchange for summoning this god in the distance that hadn't so much as given him a single glance.

Even in death, Heris still maintained that utter devotion towards this being as a result of the Magic Ovum Mirror's enticement.

Ji Zhixiu glanced upwards. That gargantuan entity made a loud roar undecipherable by humans. It raised its black ax and made a cleave at the clouds.

In an instant, the ax lit up with a glaring brilliance. Just like actual lightning, forks extended from both the top and bottom ends, joining the sky and earth together.

Thunder roared and lightning crackled within the clouds before countless streaks of electricity shot down, destroying everything in the area.

The 'god' that had been summoned was unfolding its domain.

"All personnel on standby. The Truth Union will commence the first Aether Annihilation Cannon shot. Team One to Four are to clean up dream beasts that escape from the fringes of the dream realm. Team Five and Six are to prepare for the second shot according to the set plan. All remaining personnel are to provide cover for the Aether Annihilation Cannon..."

Gresham Winston, Section Chief of Secret Rite Tower's Combat Department and a current Great Radiant Knight, barked out orders via the communications apparatus.

After issuing out his orders, he put down the communications device and watched the massive rain god in the distance. Suddenly, he recalled something and turned to his aide and shouted, "Where's Joseph?!"

His aide hesitated for a moment before replying, "He has already been contacted. He asked for the coordinates where the dream beast appeared and said... this dream beast was walking on a path to its

doom and we don't have to be so worried.”

Winston froze up for a moment and asked inexplicably, “How is this fellow so confident at a time like this? But it does seem like his style back then...”

Before he was finished, he noticed an extremely bright ray of light from the corner of his eyes.

“Annihilation Cannon? That fast...” Winston squinted and then said without a change in expression. “No, that’s not the Annihilation Cannon!

“Who is that?!”

The meeting concluded and everyone dispersed. Only Andrew was left alone in the conference room.

Baam!

“Damn it!” Andrew smashed his fists into conference desks with a black face as he stared at the unceasing rain and lightning outside the windows.

It was rare for him to lose his temper. However, this time, it was a lapse in his strategic planning. White Wolf that was originally a slight annoyance had become a full-blown issue that required the activation of the Aether Annihilation Cannon because of his mistake.

Although the Truth Union didn’t fear the threat of Supreme-ranks, it didn’t mean that Supreme-ranks were easy for them to deal with. They merely had the ability to fight against Supreme-ranks, but the price they would have to fork out was equally as painful.

With sufficient preparations, it wouldn’t be too difficult for the Truth Union to methodically get rid of a Supreme-rank entity.

But now, the situation had erupted so abruptly... Andrew could basically see the ridicule in his fellow Vice-Chairman Derrick’s eyes.

However, Andrew still persisted with his opinion that the bookstore owner definitely played a secret role behind the scenes.

The Aetheric Surveillance Network failing, this huge, unknown array as well as their surprising familiarity with Norzin's structural layout was definitely not something White Wolf could have done all by themselves.

Moreover, traces left behind by Wilde in these White Wolf hideouts as well as the hunter's operations further verified this point.

"Wait, what is that?!"

Andrew's pupils contracted as he strode to the screens of aetheric surveillance apparatus displaying the battle situation. He reached a hand out and enlarged one of them.

Within the dark rainy sky, a bright silhouette like a blazing white flame had appeared at the fringes of where the thunderclouds connected with the earth.

This figure encased in light seemed ethereal and rode on a huge and majestic griffin.

The griffin spread its wings and released a shrill squawk, as if announcing that its owner had emerged from legends.

Only

At this moment, both Secret Rite Tower and Truth Union personnel could see the armored elf with golden hair, austere olive-green eyes, and a long sword which was like a burning flame flying in the wind.

Andrew didn't know how long this battle lasted but it felt like a mere moment. The elf threw forth that light and flame which turned into a white beam that instantly passed through the skull of that rain god.

The sword-light made a loop and returned back to his hand with rumbling sounds echoing as if announcing his triumph.

The god within the rain growled in anguish as its body started to crumble starting from its head. Its eyes full of lightning were extinguished, and with a crash, the massive body collapsed to the ground, creating a huge wave within the floodwater.

At that moment, Andrew had backed into the corner of a table. When he regained his composure, he realized that it had barely been ten minutes since the order had been given to utilize the Aether Annihilation Cannon.

Chapter 83 The Rain Has Stopped

Chapter 83: The Rain Has Stopped

Boom...

The massive rain god crashed down. Waves rippled out as they hit the floodwater, sweeping away buildings and causing them to collapse.

Before this ‘god’s’ corpse, the elf riding atop the griffin like a brilliant white flame pointed his long sword at the ground in a majestic pose.

After the bloated body fell, it instantly turned into vapor and lightning.

Vapor volatilized, turning into a deluge of water that came crashing down while the lightning shot straight towards the clouds.

In an instant, this imposing entity that had brought the calamity of thunder and lightning while expanding its own domain had completely turned into aether and returned to the illusory dream realm.

Swoosh...

The rush of wind towards the griffin was easily split apart, and the water beneath its talons reflected the elf’s beautiful features.

In the myth-like scene within the gloomy environment, the elf radiated with brilliance just like the sun, stunning everyone present.

It was at this moment that Secret Rite Tower personnel awoke from their dreamy stupor.

“Uh, Chief... What should... we do now? Do we continue?”

The hesitant voice of Team One's squad leader Arnold sounded through the communications apparatus.

Winston stared at the elf closely and said, "All units remain in position and standby. Continue with the original operation and maintain your vigilance and combat readiness. Contact the Truth Union and determine where this fellow came from."

"Yes!"

Winston ended the comms and drew his own sword.

The battle hadn't concluded yet.

Or rather, this being that had suddenly appeared was the greatest threat.

From the scene that had just unfolded, there was a very high possibility that this being had also come from within the dream realm.

The people present could be considered elites amongst extraordinary beings. Every one of them would more or less know about legends of the ancient elf kingdom that were circulated amongst extraordinary beings.

The scene before them invoked an intense sense of déjà-vu for two reasons. First was the immense power displayed by this elf, and the second was that this scene was as if an ancient legend had come back to life.

Candela, king of the moon elves, the one who dared straight at the divine and the cause of the great plague.

In a time of darkness, he wielded the fire to open up new ground for his people. Even though this tale had a tragic end, that gallant and fearless spirit shown by Candela was praised by many for years to come.

But anyone would know that there was no way the elf king known as Candela could be resurrected. Thousands of years ago, he had killed himself with his own blade, and his soul filled with

resentment had intertwined with the sword and manifested into a curse.

And this sword had become a famed demon sword that killed every one of its owners.

Since Candela wasn't brought back to life, then it could only mean that someone had once again roused this ancient spirit.

Winston's pupils suddenly contracted. That demon sword! That demon sword should be in Joseph's possession!

He immediately took out his communications device. "Joseph! You..."

But before he could finish his sentence, the other party had already cut him off. "Calm down, Winston. I've seen it..."

"I'm already on the battlefield."

Having hastily rushed over, Joseph was currently standing atop the collapsed ruins of a building. With his communications device in hand, he watched the fairy-tale-like scene with a look of shock.

Even though he knew that the bookstore owner would definitely make a move, he hadn't imagined that it would happen in such a grandiose fashion.

With a deep breath, he continued, "The demon sword was handed over a few days ago. This was a decision approved by the elders, so there's no need to doubt it. It is indeed Candela here, whom I've spoken with for decades in my mind. I'm very familiar with him."

In his state of shock, Winston caught on to the important keywords. "Handed over? Who was it handed over to?!"

"S-Rank file 0114, master of S-Rank Zone 0113. Lin Jie, or Boss Lin."

"... That bookstore owner?"

"That's why I already said that there's no need to be worried."

“Huu...”

Winston exhaled sharply, then asked, “So what now? Do you know what he is going to do next? And how...how did he summon the elf king? Wait, what is he doing now?”

Within the un-dissipated storm clouds where the dream realm fracture hadn't yet closed, the griffin spread its wings and squawked in a certain direction. The elf raised his sword in that direction, his gaze as piercing as the tip of his blade.

Winston's aide shouted out, “The Annihilation Cannon!”

“What?!”

Winston looked up and saw a piercing brilliance lighting up from the distant darkness. “Did the Truth Union not abort?!”

The Truth Union had actually decided to cancel the firing, postpone the attack, and observe first, but at this moment, the armory's authority was still in the hands of Vice-Chairman Andrew.

“Fire—That being came from the dream realm. It's a dream beast! There's no justice or righteousness when it comes to a battle between dream beasts. It is just the strong preying on the weak. Understand?! What are you all hesitating for when an even more dangerous entity than the previous one is right in front of us?!”

Andrew silenced any opposing voices and tossed the analysis in his hands that verified the elf atop the griffin was a true being of the dream realm. At the same time, he gave the order to continue firing the Aether Annihilation Cannon.

The firing of the Aether Annihilation Cannon that had been temporarily postponed was restarted. After a few minutes, it was completely readied and had its sights set on the elf.

Rumble!

Massive aether energy converged into a beam of destruction that arrived on the battlefield in the blink of an eye.

With his silken armor rustling in the wind, the elf raised his sword. Glancing at the distance with a frown, he muttered to himself, “A second stage? Or some summoned little monster? Oh well, let’s just cut it.”

And he did.

The elf king gripped the sword tight and spurred his griffin to fly higher. The glimmer of his sword was like a blazing flame as he cleaved in all directions as it crashed against the blast of the Aether Annihilation Cannon.

Flame and light collided, and the high energy aether formed a spherical force field, ripping up large pieces of the ground that were instantly devoured by white light.

Glaring white light extended in all directions and shot into the vortex within the dark thunder clouds. Huge quantities of water and clouds evaporated and the atmosphere turned into a vacuum.

The cloud layer was split apart, revealing bright rays of light.

“The rain has stopped.”

A researcher in the mechanical department’s uniform climbing on a ladder saw sunlight in the distance and said to his colleague at the side.

This place was the city center between the Upper and Lower District, also known as the ‘Machine Loop’, a zone specially created for the Truth Union’s research.

Only

The center, from underground to the upper levels, was like a complicated hive-like structure full of factories and laboratories.

His fellow researcher beside him, who was holding a file, didn’t even bother looking up. “It doesn’t concern us even if the sky were to fall. Focus on your own task first.”

“That’s true but...”

Beep, beep.

The researcher on the stepladder pulled out his communications device and his face fell. “There’s a problem. The factory where the ‘Clay Idol Project’ is housed reported an attack on them.”

Chapter 84 The Sky Was Really Falling

Chapter 84: The Sky Was Really Falling

“What did you say?”

For a moment, the researcher with the file in hand thought he had heard wrongly. He raised his head now and asked with a perplexed look on his face, “What do you mean by they were attacked?”

“Who asked you not to bring along your comms—— The ‘Clay Idol Project’ factory reported an attack!”

The researcher on the ladder climbed down quickly and repeated each and every word.

“Someone intruded into the Machine Loop. Factories 01, 07, and 13 have been completely destroyed. Not to mention the stockpiled resources and materials, the third batch of semi-finished artificial humans, as well as the newly refined philosopher’s stones, are all there—It’s a big problem.”

Taking a deep breath, he continued, “We must hurry and head to a safe zone. Factory 07 isn’t very far away from here. If the philosopher’s stones that haven’t been stabilized ignite, even this place would be obliterated.”

His partner instantly paled and pointed to a direction with a slightly panicked look on his face. “Maiss, let’s head in that direction. It’s quicker this way.”

Maiss had already picked up his toolbox on the ground and started walking. As they walked, he prattled on, “Sigh, what a pity. Those artificial human samples were the most completed batch yet. Although the majority of them were still in the embryo stage, their vital signs had already started to stabilize. The aetheric affinity had also achieved an unprecedented level of 150%...”

As he went on and on, he asked his partner, “Rick, who do you think attacked us? Picking such a time where a large amount of our effort and attention was on the newly appeared S-Rank dream beast is just too much of a coincidence.”

Rick picked up some of the scattered papers he had dropped in his fluster and replied, “Don’t bother too much about it. Would all your worrying help the higher-ups with their strategic planning?”

“We need to hurry! We will lose our lives if it really blows!”

Just as he finished speaking, the two researchers heard a loud crash.

The two of them simultaneously turned around towards where the sound came from and witnessed a thick blast door falling from a height. From where they were, they could vaguely discern the blast door’s severely deformed shape.

They watched as the door fell in front of them, followed by the sound of metal colliding and shaking all around them.

This place was primarily an intersecting zone for factories with a hollow ring support and many attached pathways.

The two looked down for a moment when another explosion sounded from above.

This time, it was louder and more intense.

In the distance, thick smoke emitted from the ends of an elevated pathway, which covered the upper floors in an instant.

The two researchers immediately exchanged glances and saw the frightened face of the other. It has really blown up!

“Run!”

Both of them started running like hell.

Midway through their escape, Maiss’ comms suddenly beeped again.

Maiss flipped out his communications device and halted in his tracks when he saw what was displayed.

“What’s wrong?”

Rick was opening a door when he turned around to ask. A very bad feeling appeared when he saw Maiss’ pale and defeated face.

“The Aether Annihilation Cannon has been destroyed,” said Maiss through chattering teeth.

Rick froze for a second before he rushed over and grabbed the communications device to see the message on it.

“All personnel take notice. The Aether Annihilation Cannon has been destroyed. Status is raised to Category One alert. Personnel of D-Rank and higher are to remain at their posts. P-Rank and White-level personnel are to head to safe zones immediately...”

A second message arrived just as he finished reading.

“All personnel take notice...”

A third message was received.

The three messages that were sent in quick succession were entirely the same.

Even though Rick was already in shock, he couldn’t help questioning, “Why was this message sent three times? To emphasize a point?”

“Did you ever read the segment on notification formats in our factory’s manual for important matters?”

Maiss remained expressionless as he saw Rick shaking his head and muttered, “Only a single notification can be sent regarding the same matter.”

Rick stayed silent for a moment before grimacing. “That means to say that a total of three Aether Annihilation Cannon batteries were destroyed in succession.”

Glancing at the still dusky sky that had ceased raining, Maiss heard the rumble of a factory collapsing in the distance.

He felt that the sky... was really falling.

Boom...

Steel framework collapsed and explosions rang out. Flames leaped out from the scorched building rubble, licking away at everything and filling the air with the acrid smell of smoke.

Reagent fluids that sprayed all over the ground and flammable material around combusted and intensified the blazes.

Each and every transparent glass vessel had already been smashed. Light-blue embryonic culture fluid flowed out from these damaged vessels and bits of broken glass littered the ground. Some of the deathly pale embryos no longer had any vitality left, while a few were still hanging from the attached sustenance tubes and dripping with fluid.

“Quick! Check if there are any remaining philosopher’s stones first, then search for the injured or casualties and apply first aid or appropriate measures.”

Baam!

A set of doors were knocked open, and a team of fully-armed scholars entered. The mechanical armors they equipped on were matte black and half attached to their bodies while giving them a sturdy exterior.

They first did a quick survey from left to right to confirm that there wasn’t any abnormal aetheric activity before lowering their weapons to start rescue works and dealing with the fire.

“Examine carefully and report any findings to me. Don’t miss out on any single detail.”

The one standing at the door was the person in-charge of this

sector. Right now, his face was extremely unsightly as he surveyed the devastation within this laboratory.

Someone had broken in here and had destroyed every single artificial human specimen.

“Reporting, six researchers found. Five deceased, one still breathing. Critical care is being provided right now.”

“Reporting, found some remnant aetheric traces. Uploading imaging analysis.”

“Reporting, Specimen 1374, 1383, 567, and 277 are missing. Sending experiment data.”

The man in-charge’s expression changed when he saw the data of these four specimens from the laboratory’s database.

The data of these four specimens were categorized as especially outstanding. Three of these experimental specimens were from the third batch, and the last one was from the second batch.

Amongst these, one of them from the third batch was the most complete specimen at present. Clearly, this intruder had a clear objective.

Furthermore, the remnant aetheric traces were from the detonation of philosopher’s stones at the center of the laboratory. Given the laboratory safety measures, it was simply impossible for an outsider to stand in the middle of this laboratory and do such a thing.

That meant to say...

The person who had destroyed and looted the laboratory might not have been an intruder but rather an internal member of the Truth Union.

“Sigh, it’s really bad.”

A scholar transporting the wounded on a stretcher muttered as he

glanced at the glistening blood from injuries all over the body.

He couldn't help commenting, "It's lucky that we are only responsible for medical aid. Working in this sort of highly dangerous laboratory is really difficult."

His partner at the front end turned around for a quick glance. Half of the victim's face had practically been blown off, and he could vaguely make out that this victim was quite a young lady. "One mishap and she's fighting for her life."

The scholar behind was curious and asked, "Speaking of which, have you seen her before? I don't remember seeing such a young lass in this laboratory in the past..."

Only

As he said this, he reached out for the work badge hanging around the victim's neck.

Squelch!

A slender and pale arm suddenly thrust forward, piercing his throat like a knife. As blood spurted out, the victim leaped up, crisscrossing her arms around the front researcher's neck as he turned around and snapping his neck.

Two lifeless corpses fell to the ground limply.

The victim in a white scholar coat sprang away nimbly like a cat and vanished silently into a ventilation duct, only leaving behind the scent of fresh blood.

Chapter 85 You're Welcome

Chapter 85: You're Welcome

Chapter 85: You're Welcome

Lightning flashed, instantly lighting up the roiling dark sky.

The massive body of that god had thoroughly vanished in the darkness. There was no longer any sign of activity from the unknown entity that had launched the long-range strike.

“Is this BOSS battle over just like that?”

Lin Jie lowered his sword and spurred his griffin forward. The brilliant flame-like sword lit up the area ahead, but the fog around this place was just as quiet as before.

The enemy that had launched the latest attack did indeed catch him slightly off guard.

Mainly because its timing had been so abrupt.

He had only just immersed himself in this extremely lifelike ‘VR game’ experience. The instincts of Candela’s body as well as his soul, which was now a sword spirit, had made this battle seem like a beginner’s tutorial as it had lowered the difficulty by a great deal.

Lin Jie felt that he himself was idling and the one actually fighting was still Candela. All Lin Jie did was provide some directions and make the decision.

On top of that, the ‘god’ in this dream clearly wasn’t the ‘god’ that had made Candela go insane just by looking straight at it.

The current ‘god’ had appeared terrifying, but it couldn’t hold a candle to the one in Candela’s memories.

According to what Candela said, this new god that had once again appeared after ten thousand years was a massive threat to his

people. Thus, he had listened to Lin Jie's suggestion, which was to decide to face his past mistakes and give his all to help his people before he withered away by challenging this god.

Using his similar experience in the past to make up for his regrets back then.

Lin Jie felt that Candela's willingness to listen, admit his mistakes, and change for the better was laudable. Moreover, he felt that his own imagination within dreams was really unrivaled.

Appearance-wise, this massive BOSS had really seemed extremely oppressing, but in actuality, its fighting ability wasn't a big deal.

But since this was a dream, it was reasonable for things to turn out this way.

Only the whistling of wind could be heard beyond the black fog that stretched for miles into the distance.

Lin Jie suddenly heard Candela's relieved voice resounding from within him, "It's over... Thanks to your help, I have completed my final wish and have used whatever remaining strength I had left to protect my people and their land.

"Ten thousand years have passed and everything has gone with the wind. All I can do is only this much.

"Running away forever is much easier than facing my sins. Without your guidance, I fear that I would never be able to confront my cowardly and despicable true self for all eternity.

"Thank you."

Lin Jie felt his heart stir and glanced down at the sword in his hands. His exquisite gauntlets emitted a faint glow, and his entire arms started to become transparent, gradually turning into golden grains that scattered in the wind.

Haa... Such an ending indeed...

Lin Jie mused to himself. Candela was already long dead after all,

just that his resentment and bitterness were bound to the sword, causing his soul to linger for ten thousand years.

From all of Candela's memories that he experienced, Lin Jie felt that Candela was indeed a true sage king before he went mad.

To Candela, being able to sacrifice all his remaining strength to once again protect his own country was a blessing indeed, just that he didn't dare face his past because of his cowardice and self-blame.

The chicken soup that Teacher Lin had doled out this time was exceedingly effective. Not only had it opened up Candela's heart, but it had also even helped put the bitter soul that lingered on the sword to rest.

Although he's perished, being able to return to his own homeland and kingdom was ultimately the best conclusion for him. This should be the ending of this story-line, haa.

As Lin Jie mused, he smiled slightly and gestured with his hands. "You're welcome."

Candela's body gradually faded and the golden grains became twinkling lights that dispersed to every direction.

Darkness shrank wherever the lights reached, and the soil covered by the thick fog was slowly exposed inch by inch with fresh flowers sprouting out and swaying in the wind.

The kingdom from ten thousand years ago was a flourishing land.

The remaining water vapor in the sky above the scorched battlefield condensed into a light drizzle.

Smoke and dust diffused into the air and were swept away by the wind.

Thick clouds that filled the sky had been scattered by the immense aetheric blast, and the torrential rain that had gone on for a month finally reached its conclusion.

The griffin-riding elf was like a god towering on the fringes where

dream and reality intersected.

His sword reflected the massive crater ahead and an expanse of apocalyptic ruins.

This confrontation had merely lasted for a few minutes, but everyone involved or observing the battle had witnessed this elf going straight up against the Aether Annihilation Cannon and had destroyed all three of the Truth Union's cannon batteries.

Secret Rite Tower knights were left dumbfounded and it took them several seconds to snap out from their daze.

Even though Winston had shouted out "Stay calm, maintain your vigilance" through his comms, those who were on the fringes of the dream realm couldn't help falling into a momentary panic.

Meanwhile, the Truth Union was in a state of deathly silence and utter chaos.

Winston knew that his orders wouldn't do much to control the situation under these circumstances. His own back was drenched in a cold sweat and his palm around his communications device was clammy.

"Huu..."

He exhaled sharply as he watched the elven king from the legends told.

Then, his pupils contracted as he noticed the elf's body starting to turn into specks of light which disappeared shortly after.

Following that, Winston sensed the dream realm shrinking and the aetheric fluctuations started to weaken.

From his years of experience, he was able to determine that the dream realm fracture had started to close following that divinely dream beast's demise. However, his eyes were still firmly fixed on that elf.

Since this was a voluntary dissipation, it meant that this ancient

brave spirit was indeed summoned by someone and had been given orders.

Naturally, there was a very high possibility that the one pulling the strings behind the scenes was that bookstore owner.

I wonder if he will still do anything else...

Then, Winston noticed the elf smiling brightly and saying, "You're welcome," while waving his hand.

You're welcome?!

Winston couldn't help looking towards where the elf's gaze was at. That was the direction of the Truth Union that had been beaten by him.

Anyone would know that 'You're welcome' was a response to a thank you.

Only

Then, the meaning of this phrase was 'There's no need to thank me for beating you all to a pulp. It's what I ought to do.'

Baam! Crash!

Sounds of hands slamming on the table and a bunch of items being swept to the floor rang out.

On the display screen in the conference room, the smiling elf's hand waving-gesture and saying 'You're welcome' was an especially unpleasant sight.

Andrew's face was nearly distorted from rage. Gritted teeth, bulging veins, and the trembling body displayed his extreme fury.

Chapter 86 Mr. Lin Said It Well In

Chapter 86: Mr. Lin Said It Well Indeed

If the elf's pure intention was a 'You're welcome', or if the Truth Union hadn't fired their Annihilation Cannon, the matter would just have been a matter of 'King Candela from the legends reappearing and slaying a 'god'.

Then, his words could probably be explained as, "No need to thank me for helping you all get rid of this Supreme-rank dream beast."

But in reality, traces of the clash of aetheric energy still lingered and the devastated battlefield was still heated from the cannon's blast.

In such a situation, a smiling Candela had said, "You're welcome," with a wave of the hand in the direction of the Truth Union.

There was no other explanation besides mocking the Truth Union.

More importantly, the impression most people had on King Candela from the legends wasn't this 'frivolous'. And thus, their minds started to come up with thoughts and guesses.

This gesture was probably done under the instructions of his summoner hiding behind the scenes.

And it made them think of an even more terrifying point—

The person behind the scenes hadn't yet shown his hand, yet the departed spirit he summoned had already left the Truth Union bruised and battered.

Although it looked like a one-off, nobody knew how much effort the person behind the scenes had expended for this summon. After all, since just now, there had only been that one immense aetheric

fluctuation.

This meant to say that this was all insignificant to the person behind the scenes.

Andrew's fists were still tightly clenched from smashing the tabletop. His tightly wound muscles were trembling uncontrollably.

This shaking reminded him that regardless of whether he admitted it or not, a part of his anger was a result of the fear in his heart.

And when this fear reached an extreme level, it turned into fury.

Andrew's expression became even more downcast when he realized it. He remained this way till the cold mechanical beeps of a notification snapped him out of it.

"Due to the violation of regulations, your authority will be forcibly revoked temporarily and you will be subjected to a review. Please do not move about and stay where you are..."

Andrew's eyes widened and he suddenly turned around.

The conference room doors were pushed open. A group of Destructive-rank scholars in black mechanical armor suits entered and pointed their guns at Andrew. Executives from other departments rushed over in succession, and the Truth Union's other Vice-Chairman stepped forth from amongst them.

"Andrew."

Diamante pushed his glasses up his nose bridge delicately and said, "I guess you ought to know that you've made a big mistake and caused the Truth Union to suffer huge losses."

Andrew eyed this younger and recently-promoted equal. He took a deep breath, put on a usual smile as always, and replied, "It was indeed a strategic lapse on my part. However, there weren't any mistakes, and my decision-making was according to the sequence of events. My only failure was mis-gauging the enemy's strength. And for this, the blame should be placed on..."

He definitely wouldn't admit that his own shortsightedness and the recent continuous setbacks in the bookstore's investigation had affected his mentality and were the cause behind this lapse.

Otherwise, he would definitely be more prudent and meticulous as per his usual practice.

Diamante shrugged. "There's no need for you to tell me all this. Right now, you should be thinking about how to resolve the problems resulting from this incident. Say, for example, the three cannon batteries? And also some other areas which you might need to explain yourself... From what I know, it seems like you have been investigating this S-Rank bookstore rather vigorously and seemed to have quite some hostility towards it."

"So what about it?" said Andrew with a frown as he started to have a bad feeling. "It was White Wolf that summoned the dream beast this time. What relation does it have to the bookstore?"

Diamante met his gaze and said casually, "Looks like you don't know it yet. Secret Rite Tower contacted us, verifying that the one who summoned Candela was indeed the bookstore owner."

Disbelief arose on Andrew's face as this information struck him like a bolt.

Diamante continued, "Thus, we have reason to suspect that you acted this way due to your own selfish motives. And it was because of you that the friendly bookstore owner would attack us out of self-defense, ultimately leading to tremendous losses for the Truth Union."

Andrew refuted angrily, "Utter nonsense! I..."

Midway through the explanation, Diamante interrupted, "Like I've said, telling me all this is useless."

Andrew glared at him furiously. Upon seeing the mocking look in Diamante's eyes, he suddenly understood—

He was jealous of his younger, fellow Vice-Chairman, and it seemed like the other party had the exact same sentiments towards Andrew.

He's using any excuse he can find to incriminate me?

Moreover, Andrew's failures this time round had been entirely the result of his own devising.

Andrew looked defeated and suddenly felt helpless. But at this moment, everyone received a new message on their communications devices.

"Machine Loop has suffered an attack..."

There was a glint in Andrew's eyes as he stopped in his tracks. In just a few seconds, he had processed this message and spoke up calmly, "During a Category One alert status, White-level assessor personnel have to remain at their posts to maintain surveillance and ensure the mechanisms are able to run as per normal... Am I right, Vice-Chairman Diamante?"

"It seems like this Boss Lin doesn't have a good temper, huh..." Winston spoke into his communications device after giving orders for his subordinates to clean up the battlefield.

"You would be pissed too if a barking mad dog suddenly runs into your home, causing a ruckus and trampling all over the grass."

Joseph's voice came from behind him.

Winston immediately turned around and saw that familiar old face.

"Does that mean to say that that Supreme-rank dream beast was a mad dog and we are good dogs?" said Winston with a slight grin.

Joseph came over, patted Winston's shoulder, and said with a wide smile, "Hey, partner. You are thinking too much. You all are just mere fleas."

Winston took a deep breath, resisting the urge to punch this old comrade's face before sighing, "But nonetheless, this episode seems to have reached the end of its phase."

Joseph looked up to the gradually scattering clouds in the sky and said, “But the matter is still far from over.”

Their Intelligence Department had been investigating the source of the Magic Ovum Mirror all this time but hadn’t gotten a single result.

The person or organization that cast this magical object into Norzin was the true, troubling, invisible enemy.

Winston took a closer look at the face of the former Great Radiant Knight by his side. The eyes on that firm and experienced face seemed to be glowing with a sharp, incisive light.

Winston suddenly felt that he was once again gazing at that indomitable sacred flame.

Due to the deluge of water as a result of the rain god’s demise, the surrounding area had flooded.

Debris and garbage were swept by the current and headed towards the sewer entrances, once in a while obstructed by buildings at the side.

Splish splash...

A swollen and frighteningly twisted corpse was fished out, revealing the still fervent look of worship on its face.

An old man dressed in a black suit kept away his umbrella and squatted down, his beady snake-like eyes flickering coldly behind the black steel mask. He reached up and pulled up Heris’ corpse. “Guiding him for so long wasn’t in vain. Truly perfect material indeed.”

Only

Scarlet Sect and White Wolf?

When this bunch had resurrected his disciple in an attempt to

assassinate him, Wilde had already decided how they would all die.

Mr. Lin said it well indeed. Be firm and ruthless in all matters and never give an opportunity for things to return and haunt me.

After giving the map of Norzin's sewer layout and teaching Heris the sacrificial method of using life as fuel, Wilde had watched them massacre one another, eventually destroying themselves from the inside as well as providing him with a tremendous amount of material.

Wilde knew that he had definitely lived up to the bookstore owner's expectations.

Chapter 87 Original Formula

Chapter 87: Original Formula

When the godly battle above concluded, the fleeing Ji Zhixiu had led her remaining people into the developed drainage systems beneath.

Staying in the vicinity of such a high-level battle was tantamount to throwing away her life. Although she wouldn't necessarily be swatted away like a fly, there was no need for Ji Zhixiu to take such a risk.

Thus, she had sneaked away early on.

White Wolf was wiped out, and her revenge was complete.

The Supreme-rank dream beast that Heris called the 'god of rain' would naturally be left for Secret Rite Tower and the Truth Union to handle.

Most of the time, even a Supreme-rank wouldn't be able to cause much trouble, so Ji Zhixiu didn't need to worry.

And if even Secret Rite Tower and the Truth Union couldn't handle it, Ji Zhixiu wouldn't even have the chance to worry.

But for her, there was still something more important—Taking over everything that White Wolf had left behind.

No matter how powerful a new hunter group was, they wouldn't be able to gain the recognition of other organizations nor would they have any way to quickly establish themselves. She needed the help of White Wolf's legacy.

White Wolf was able to stand strong and grow for so many years wasn't just because of their strong members. Beyond that, they still possessed information, secrets, and connections...

Of course, there was the most important thing—The formulation of

sordid blood from the Sky Wolf.

The basis for any hunter group's establishment was a sordid blood formula belonging to that organization.

Dream beast blood possesses a strong 'toxicity'. Without the aid of an appropriate formula, this blood would be like poison.

There were two means to obtain such formulas.

The first way was countless blind self-experiments by hunters from ancient times to obtain an original formula, which then was passed down through the ages.

This sort of formula didn't overly weaken the blood in the body and could raise one's power by a huge amount. However, because it was relatively crude, the side effects were greater and the probability of being unable to withstand the second injection was rather high.

The other means was through an experimental formula from a chemist.

Through the use of modern apparatus for precise composition, such improved formulas were safer and milder, but at the same time, sacrificed a portion of power.

Quality experimental formulas were exceedingly rare, and the majority was ordinary fare for the upper bounds of P-rank. Many hunter groups would use this sort of formula to train up large numbers of fodder members.

Therefore, every original formula was precious. At least many times more precious than most experimental formulas.

The possession of a complete formula would enable an organization to continue producing hunters.

This was the foundation of any hunter group.

The reason White Wolf was able to become one of the largest hunter groups was mostly that they possessed the Sky Wolf's sordid blood original formula.

Spider had revolted against White Wolf, but if Ji Zhixiu controlled the Sky Wolf formula, then she would truly be the orthodox White Wolf and nobody could say otherwise.

Moreover, she required White Wolf's intel to conceal her own source of information gathering and make it convenient for her to utilize Ruen's soul for gaining intel.

"This is the place."

Ji Zhixiu scrutinized the narrow passageway with surrounding walls full of cracks and viscera and pus all over the floor. There was a large, pitch-black gap, and the wind flowing through created a faint howling.

Hunters stepped forward and speedily widened the hole and revealed the White Wolf's true final hideout.

A strong putrid stench of decaying corpses hit their nostrils.

Ji Zhixiu frowned and simply shut off her sense of smell before heading in.

As she entered, she realized the floor she was stepping on was moist and sticky.

She glanced down and saw the ground covered in a layer of blood mixed with bits and pieces of flesh.

All around her were heaps of corpses that were still dripping with strange fluids.

Ji Zhixiu's eyes dimmed. Those White Wolf hunters had long descended into madness to be able to live here for so long.

She walked further in and saw the incubator high up in the center of the domed ceiling.

That huge device was completely cracked and twisted out of shape. Crystals had blossomed crazily from within, emitting a faint glow completely contrasting the blood and flesh all around.

The sleek mirror center was shattered into fragments, revealing a dark color of the abyss.

This was a whole Magic Ovum Mirror.

“Miss, I’ve found the formula.”

Kaiyi’s voice came from above as a slender silhouette leaped down from the platform above and handed a box to Ji Zhixiu.

Ji Zhixiu nodded and took a look at this box which looked ordinary except for a blood-red sigil painted on it.

She tried opening this box but wasn’t able to do so.

“It’s probably a white magician’s sealing sigil,” said Ji Zhixiu with a frown.

Kaiyi suggested, “How about letting Mr. Haywood take a look? Perhaps he might have a way.”

The white magician Haywood that Ji Bonong hired was a private magician that catered to the rich and noble. To put it simply in words, his status was that of a guest delegate.

Ji Bonong would give a remuneration, and Haywood would work for him.

Ji Zhixiu would also frequently consult him from time to time. But when Kaiyi mentioned Haywood now, Ji Zhixiu thought about the little doubt that she had in her heart.

The ‘Loyalty’ brand on Ruen’s body had clearly been a sigil technique that would constrain his soul to the master. However, it hadn’t fully restricted his actions and he was able to work in secret to eventually become a proficient information peddler.

This meant that the white magician organization wasn’t as safe and trust-able, unlike the image people had of them.

Ji Zhixiu hadn’t been able to use Steel Resolve to extract too much from Ruen’s soul, so she wasn’t too certain of the situation.

There would be unimaginable consequences if such a confidential sordid blood formula was leaked.

Shaking her head slowly, she kept away the box and said, “I will think about it after we get back. It’s too dangerous here.”

“I will search more then.” Kaiyi nodded but didn’t think too much about it.

At this moment, another hunter ran over. “Leader, I found a map.”

“A map?” Ji Zhixiu took it, and upon seeing it, understood this was a map of Norzin’s underground passages and also the reason why White Wolf had been able to move so freely in this secret underground passageway system.

“Well done,” Ji Zhixiu praised. With all these, the new Spider would have even more cards in hand.

After all of White Wolf’s remaining items were taken, hunters started laying explosives and prepared to completely get rid of the remainder of the Magic Ovum Mirror.

Only

They were experts at dealing with magical objects from the dream realm.

Ji Zhixiu gazed up at the badly damaged incubator above and asked, “Everything in place?”

Upon receiving confirmation, everyone withdrew with haste.

The explosion boomed behind them, destroying the entire intersection of passageways and even making the domed ceiling crumble down as a deluge of water flowing in.

Boom!

Rumble...

Chapter 88 Clay Idol No.277

Chapter 88: Clay Idol No.277

No. 227 didn't have a name.

'Clay Idol S277' was her number and it was imprinted on her nape along with a digital bar-code.

The 227th specimen born from Clay Idol Artificial Human Project, second batch. This was the significance behind this number.

Since the start of this plan by the Truth Union's Mechanical Department, there were a total of three experimental batches and 3050 serial numbers.

There were 50 in the first batch with a prefix F, 1000 in the second with prefix S, 2000 in the third batch with prefix T.

No. 277 was one of the many failed products.

However, No. 277 didn't feel dejected because out of these 3050 experiments, all of them were actually failures.

Occasionally, through the transparent glass capsule, she would hear researchers in white coats grumbling as they walked past.

"This experiment is getting increasingly intensive and we have to collect data from dawn to dusk. The top also doesn't seem intent on allocating more funds either, and the experiment isn't seeing much progress.

"Sighhh... and we are only able to stay inside the lab because of confidentiality regulations. I'm bored to death."

The colleague at the side asked, "Not much progress? I sorted out the aetheric affinity data. Isn't it already at 200%?"

The researcher rapped his knuckles on the glass vessel as he glanced at the blurry silhouette within the culture fluid. "Mm, this one is

currently the best specimen with a highest aetheric affinity of 200% predicted. However, the philosopher's stone's concentration within her flesh and blood is excessive, leading to her having an approximate lifespan of only a year."

"A year.... What will happen after a year?"

Boom!

The first researcher made the gesture of an explosion with his hands. Chuckling, he explained, "Gradually, the power of a philosopher's stone cannot be replaced and the aetheric affinity diminished. Eventually, these specimens won't be able to control the flow of aether and expand like a balloon... That is why this batch has to be quickly destroyed if the next experimental batch produces results.

"In a few days, the first batch of experimental specimens will be destroyed."

Thus, No. 277 knew that she only had a year remaining to live.

Glass and culture fluid provided two layers of separation which made everything beyond, such as people passing by or the flickering of lights, seem distorted.

Day after day passed.

When all the lights in the laboratory were out except for the flashing automatic guiding lights and the surroundings were absolutely silent, No. 277 reached out to touch the capsule wall.

Her slender white finger reached out to touch its inverted image on the transparent glass. The inverted reflection of her finger formed a pale oval— she had no fingerprints.

The rigid and cold sensation of the glass was novel, totally unlike the sensations of liquid flowing and syringes being injected.

No. 277 suddenly felt a sense of curiosity and pressed herself against the glass, carefully surveying everything beyond. It turns out that the outside was filled with many different and unknown

objects.

After a long time, she pulled herself back. The glass couldn't withstand her strength and was making creaking sounds as it approached its shattering point.

From that day, No. 277 started to long for the night.

She noticed many details that she hadn't seen before, and all sorts of ideas popped up in her head. Her extraordinary hearing and eyesight allowed her to grasp the information she needed in an instant.

She learned the patrolling schedules and personnel shift change timing of the laboratory. Through bits of information she picked out from overhearing conversations, she learned about happenings in other laboratories and factories as well as figured out the layout of the entire Machine Loop.

She also knew—

Someone would be making a move tonight.

He was amongst the bunch of scholars, laughing away with them while at the same time tampering with some philosopher's stones which in the next moment exploded instantaneously.

A loud boom shook the entire building as flames engulfed everything. All the glass capsules in the laboratory shattered from the blast shortly after, sending glass shards flying in all directions.

The culprit had already obtained the required capsules at the same time and left quickly.

No. 277 got up from the ground and surveyed her surroundings.

Flames raged furiously, the heat causing the tips of her hair to curl up. She choked and trembled as sensation of acute pain she had never experienced before coursed through her body while making her heart pound rapidly.

She staggered forward, her entire body still dripping wet, her long

waist-length hair plastered to her body.

She looked down at her own hands, harnessing the aether to dry herself. She then picked out the clothes and badge on one of the corpses.

Sizzle~

The corpse was tossed into the fire, and with her assistance, it was incinerated in a flash.

She laid down and stared at the collapsing ceiling. Then, she quietly turned to the side, curling up, and started counting in her heart.

One.

Two.

Three.

Baam!

An armed squad broke the door down.

A cool, damp wind breezed past No. 277's ears.

The stench of blood in the air was thick, but most people would only be able to discern the earthy scent of mud mixed with rain and other random smells.

Her white coat fluttered in the wind as she darted around this huge city whilst avoiding people like a wary feline.

But along this quiet yet clamorous street, No. 277 couldn't help starting to feel a sense of loss, while at the same time, her body temperature spiked rapidly.

A gentle twinkling light on this dark street made her halt in her tracks.

“Huuu...”

No. 277 jumped off the rooftop.

Her body swayed and her vision started to blur.

She suddenly felt as if she could see the huge gash on her chest.

Her body still required injections of sustenance fluids for it to maintain its stability. Although self-regulation on her own was possible, she would need time...

Before No. 277 finished her thoughts, her vision turned dark and she lost consciousness.

Lin Jie woke up in the middle of the night due to the dream realm being cut off.

He sat up in bed and gazed at the sword on the desk beside.

“Candela...”

Lin Jie kneaded his temples and got down from the bed.

The vivid dream was still fresh in his mind.

When his hands came into contact with the sword stuck in Candela’s chest, Lin Jie had even imagined the entirety of Candela’s life in that short moment.

Glancing at the sword now actually gave Lin Jie an overwhelming sensation of familiarity.

“I must be still half asleep. Better go wash my face.”

After washing his face in the washroom, Lin Jie suddenly realized that the rain outside seemed to have stopped. However, it seemed like something else was brewing. There seemed to be a glare of flames from outside the window as well as some sort of clamor from the distance.

Lin Jie really had enough of the horrendous weather this month and

went downstairs to open the door with a slight hint of pleasant surprise.

Cool, crisp air after the rain hit him, making his entire body tingle.

The rain had indeed stopped.

Only

Only some ponding water remained on the sides of the street, rippling with the wind.

Lin Jie took a deep breath and felt refreshed.

There seemed to be a fire faraway in the distance. Thick smoke was billowing up into the sky and a tall building collapsed with a loud crash, causing the ground to shake slightly.

“Eh?”

Just as he was about to head out for a better look, he suddenly noticed a person lying on the ground nearby, as well as the blood staining the coat she had on.

Chapter 89 Let Her Experience

Chapter 89: Let Her Experience

Bang!

Lin Jie kicked open the door to his bookstore. He placed the young girl on the recliner chair and pulled out his communications device at the same time, thinking to himself that he had probably come across something troubling.

However, if he were to do nothing, once the flooding from the rain had subsided, the environment could easily lead to a more severe infection.

Lin Jie observed this young girl in a blood-stained white coat. Her long wet hair was plastered all over her face, but the blood on her cheeks was still obvious.

From head to toe, her snow-white skin that even seemed translucent was covered with wounds that were dripping blood.

The wounds covering the entire body seemed to have a certain directionality and along with the burnt flesh made Lin Jie guess that this young girl was likely a victim of a blast.

At least, according to Lin Jie's vast knowledge, the bruising throughout the body of this young girl was a clear sign of injury from experiencing a blast wave.

She should probably have been a distance away from the center of the explosion...

Lin Jie frowned. Blast injuries usually caused heavy internal damage and moderate external damage. An intense blast wave could cause internal organs to rupture, and the possibility of internal hemorrhaging and bone fractures was high.

However, the wounds on this young lady's body were minor, and

internal bleeding wouldn't have resulted in such a large quantity of blood loss.

Furthermore, the blood-stains on her white coat were in huge splatters and didn't seem to coincide with the injuries on her body. It meant that this blood probably wasn't hers.

Lin Jie had no way of determining what exactly happened too.

Therefore, his first reaction was to use his communications device to call the hospital. However...

Beep... beep...

He was met with a busy tone.

Lin Jie sighed. It does make sense with such a massive fire over there. Seems like at least a dozen streets are affected, and the emergency teams probably aren't able to handle the large number of casualties.

At the very least, the phone lines for the hospitals in the area are probably flooded.

He put down his communications device and decided to try again in a bit.

—The so-called communications device was the cellphone of this world.

As previously mentioned, Azir's technological standards were comparable to Earth in the eighties and nineties. That period was roughly when the brick cellphone started to evolve into the flip phone.

However, the cellphone advancements in this world seemed a little quicker. The communications devices here were basically slider phones now.

Of course, such an item wasn't something most folk could afford at present. Just like how an old television set was something that could be flaunted by the next-door boss, those that could possess a

communications device were basically people in the affluent category.

And Lin Jie's communications device had been given by a customer.

Lin Jie only knew a handful of people, and the backward gaming industry meant that there wasn't even a snake game installed. Thus, Lin Jie hadn't really used this communications device, but he still carried it with him all the time in case of emergencies.

Reality proved that his precaution was on-point.

As he tried calling the hospital again and hearing the busy tone once more, Lin Jie noticed the badge hanging from this young girl's neck.

He reached over and picked it up. The back of this badge had a faint white triangle printed on it, while some sort of warped ouroboros formed the edges.

I've never seen such an insignia before...

As Lin Jie thought to himself, he turned the badge over and was slightly startled when he saw that it had a photo of a young man.

Lin Jie's attention had been on the wounds as well as the stained coat so he hadn't noticed these clothes weren't her own.

Considering that widespread disaster in the distance and this young girl's still drenched body, Lin Jie guessed that she might be a casualty that had managed to flee from the blast and fire.

But she had on a researcher's lab coat which clearly didn't belong to her, and there was also that huge amount of blood. This meant to say that she wasn't an ordinary casualty.

Lin Jie interpreted it like how any normal person would.

This clothing isn't the child's, but she shouldn't have put it on herself either.

The damage on her clothes doesn't align with the injuries on her

body. She clearly didn't have these clothes on when she experienced the blast.

That means to say, she put on these clothes after she was injured.

Would anyone severely injured from a blast still take off other people's clothing to wear like it was nothing?

Moreover, even this identification badge is neatly hung around her neck.

Clearly, someone else had helped her put on these clothes, and it was likely to be the person on the ID badge.

As for why the disguise and its purpose, Lin Jie could merely make his own guess for such a deep question and definitely had no way of precisely knowing the truth.

"Gasp..."

At this moment, the young girl's eyelashes fluttered and before opening wide, revealing a look of loss and wariness.

Lin Jie squatted down and reached out to pat her head, trying his best with a gentle smile. "You're awake. Are you in discomfort? Don't move around too much for now.

"Your injuries are serious. Let me try contacting the hospital..."

The young girl noticed the warm smile on this person's face, then quickly observed the unfamiliar surroundings. Her tense body relaxed slightly when she instantly determined that this was a single young man who lived all on his own.

No aetheric fluctuations, an ordinary person.

He probably thought that the blood on her body was her own. In this case, gaining his trust wouldn't be too hard.

She reached out to grab the sleeve of Lin Jie's shirt, and whispered hoarsely, "Don't call the hospital, they want to kill me... I ran away."

Lin Jie was momentarily startled. Looking at the young girl's frail figure under these oversize clothes, he pondered for a bit, and a very popular character of the Detective Conan series came to his mind — Ai Haibara.

From his memory, Ai Haibara had escaped from her secret organization and had collapsed by the roadside in an over-sized lab coat after shrinking.

Could it be...

Maybe not the part about shrinking, but could the blast and fire have been caused by some sort of top secret and dangerous research?

This hypothesis combined with the young girl's words seemed rather plausible.

The owner of this coat, presumably a researcher of a top secret organization, encountered some life-threatening danger, possibly occurring so quickly that he had no way of escaping the predicament.

And at the same time, this child that didn't have an ordinary relationship with the person was present. And from the large white coat this girl is wearing, perhaps...

The plot was like this— A researcher possessed a secret and was held hostage by a villainous organization with threats to his loved ones.

In the end, this researcher had enough and caused an explosion, no longer caring about his own life and letting this child wear the coat and escape to seek help.

Lin Jie felt that he already had both sides of the story.

Why was the young girl's entire body covered with wounds? Because there had been a battle between two sides at the scene then.

Why was this young girl completely drenched? This was to lessen

the burn injuries she got in the process of escaping.

Why was she wearing someone else's clothes? Upon encountering terrifying threats, the owner of this coat had let her escape.

The young girl shook her head, staring at Lin Jie with her imploring eyes.

Lin Jie closed the communications device and sighed. He kept the communications device back in his pocket and consoled, "Alright, I won't make the call. But regardless of what happened, we still have to ensure you are fine... External injuries can be treated easily, but internal ones can't be seen. It's no laughing matter if your internal organs are damaged as it can become a matter of life and death."

He then continued with a serious expression, "Even though I'm not a doctor, I can still discern most injuries... You have to give me a reason to be at ease if you don't wish to go to the hospital.

"So, please cooperate and let me take a look at your injuries, alright?"

Lin Jie observed the young girl before him and put on a reliable and earnest look as he reached out to hold the young girl's cold little hands tightly, giving her some warmth and strength.

Sigh, I'm just too kindhearted and willing to help strangers overcome difficulties. This young girl wouldn't have been so lucky if she had run into others instead.

Such a horrible experience would definitely leave her with lingering trauma.

I must let her experience the warmth of the world!

The young girl stared at her hand which was being held and had made her feel an unprecedented sensation. She couldn't help freezing up before silently nodding her head.

"Alright, make sure to sound out if you feel uncomfortable."

Lin Jie reached out and pressed on some areas that could possibly

hurt. “Is it painful?”

The young girl shook her head.

Lin Jie continued with a rough diagnosis on other areas of her body.

It was strange indeed.

Her body clearly showed signs of being battered by a blast wave yet it seemed like she hadn’t suffered any ruptured organs, but there were definitely some slight fractures.

“There’s no need to go to the hospital if you don’t have any serious internal injuries. However, you still have to receive proper treatment...”

The young girl glanced at Lin Jie with a look of bewilderment. However, the thought of her recently attained freedom made her tighten her grip.

Having advised her this, Lin Jie continued, “Is there anything else you need? I’ll be heading to the basement to get some tools to treat your external injuries. I’ll be back in a bit.”

“Cold.” The young girl glanced towards the opened main door.

“Ah, I forgot to shut it. Give me a moment.” Lin Jie chuckled before getting up and heading to the door.

The look in the young girl’s eyes instantly turned cold. As she watched Lin Jie closely, she got up into a half-crouch on the recliner chair. Her entire body tensed like a drawn bowstring, ready to let loose at any moment, gracefully pouncing on and killing the young man before her...

Suddenly, she froze in her tracks. Her gaze that had tracked Lin Jie was drawn to the stone gargoyle on the counter-top in the same direction.

Upon seeing the twinkling red eyes of the stone gargoyle, she sensed a large amount of sinister and rancorous aetheric activity

from within it.

An eerie coldness gripped her heart. This was a sensation of being watched!

The stone gargoyle was alive!

Only

It was akin to waking up from a nightmare for the young girl who became aware of this. She opened her eyes wide and surveyed her surroundings. Her aetheric affinity that hadn't recovered due to her injuries came flooding back to her.

Everything... here... was alive.

Her entire body stiffened as she looked towards Lin Jie who was now closing the door.

An ordinary human?

She laid back down on the recliner chair obediently.

Chapter 90 Bookstore Assistant

Chapter 90: Bookstore Assistant

Lin Jie shut the door and couldn't help smiling when he turned around and saw the young girl lying in the half-inclined recliner chair.

This kid's eyes were unblinking as she stared at the ceiling, and her dazed expression reminded Lin Jie of a dove: adorable and slightly birdbrained.

Lin Jie hadn't really laid down in this recliner chair ever since he brought it up from the basement, yet the two that had taken a rest in it coincidentally seemed like patients.

In addition to the low transactions in his bookstore business, Lin Jie felt like he was doubling up as a doctor as well.

An IV drip stand at the side would really complete the whole picture.

But even though he had lots of knowledge on both Eastern and Western medicine, as well as a wealth of practical experience, his standard was still far from an actual doctor.

Part of all this knowledge and experience came from occasionally reading up medical journals in his free time, and the other portion came from experiences during his research trips to remote villages and primitive tribes.

Conducting research in these kinds of remote areas, especially those ancient villages that never saw any visitors, was an extremely dangerous task.

In places like this, far separated from the outside world, the geographical environment could be extremely complicated. Sometimes, there wouldn't be maps or even a proper hospital, and the place would entirely lack safety measures.

When Lin Jie was slightly younger, he had accompanied his teacher's team to many places for research. Although he was only helping to make records back then, he still gained a lot of firsthand experience by just tagging along.

At times, the team needed to scale mountains or cross treacherous ravines to reach the destinations. In places like this, a single misstep could lead to broken bones, serious injury, or even death. And not to mention the wild beasts that could appear along the wayside.

Lin Jie's most terrifying memory was when their group was hit by a thick fog while trekking up a mountain. The fog that encompassed them severely decreased visibility, and in the blink of an eye, a member of the team had disappeared.

At that time, the entire team was dumbstruck and could only cautiously probe around, only to discover that the plateau they were on was only a few meters away from a steep precipice where the bottom of the drop couldn't even be seen.

Thus, with one misstep in that thick fog, that person had silently vanished into the abyss.

Of course, situations like this were rare.

The troubles Lin Jie mainly experienced were those situations commonly encountered in the wilderness where injuries were practically guaranteed. Members of the research team knew the risks when they signed up.

Over time, Lin Jie became rather familiar with dealing with external injuries and ailments that commonly occurred.

However, for Lin Jie, anything beyond that would be clutching at straws.

Even though Lin Jie had read a lot of relevant books, medicine was still a subject born out of actual practice. Idle discussion on it wouldn't really have any meaning.

"Alright, I'll be back in a bit to treat your wounds. Don't move about too much and wait for me."

Lin Jie flashed a warm smile at the young girl, and after seeing her nod her head obediently, he headed down to the basement.

The young girl watched Lin Jie disappear down the stairs, but she didn't dare move an inch.

At first, her body and reactions might be still sluggish from her injuries, but after experiencing the immense resentment within the stone gargoyle, it was as if a switch in her had been turned on, instantly freezing up her entire body.

She could sense certain things within the bookstore squirming, breathing and gazing.

The columns of neatly arranged bookshelves were like a colossal beast hidden in the shadows.

Every single moment, she felt gazes lingering over her skin as if many people were standing right before her face, staring and hitting her with their warm breaths.

Right now, her back was drenched with cold sweat and every single hair on her body stood on end.

Unimaginable, indescribable.

What exactly are these things...

Yet, this young man seemed to show casual nonchalance despite being amongst all these terrifying things.

That warm, gentle smile had become a sinister and deceitful warning in her eyes.

How frightening!

But why would such a scary being save me?

The young girl watched Lin Jie reappear, this time with a first-aid kit in hand.

Lin Jie went beside the young girl and first prepared some

disinfectant from the first-aid kit he hadn't used in a long time. Casually, he asked, "Right, I still don't know your name yet. My name is Lin Jie and this bookstore is opened by me. However, business isn't all that good as you can see."

"Don't have one." The young girl cast a sidelong glance. "I have no name."

Lin Jie froze. Is she trying to bid farewell to all the pain and suffering from the past? After all, she's probably around 15 or 16, there's no way she doesn't have a name.

Perhaps, it could be that she doesn't wish to reveal her own identity as well. How much trauma has she suffered from all these injuries on her body?

Lin Jie suddenly felt a hint of pity for this expressionless young girl before him.

She was really a pitiful, strong, and obstinate kid.

"The past is in the past. Just treat it as if everything before never happened. As long as you are willing to let it go, days of the past will merely be numbers that hold no significance. It's the present and future that are always the most important."

Lin Jie consoled her as he started to treat the girl's external wounds.

"This might sting a little, so please bear with it."

The young girl nodded, her gaze falling on the man's earnest side profile.

Her past was indeed just those mere numbers.

277 represented her life within the glass capsule, not her.

Lin Jie disinfected, applied medicine, and bandaged the wounds all over her body in a set pattern.

He got the girl to turn to the side and removed the towel he had placed behind the girl for her to use as a pillow. Seeing the amount

of blood soaked up by it made his heart shudder.

There were a number of bloody wounds on the back of the young girl's neck.

There was also a large patch of blood on her back, probably from scrapes after falling from the blast wave.

Lin Jie pulled his gaze away and continued to work. After handling all of her visible wounds, he patted her head to comfort her.

“Have you thought about what sort of life you want? What are your future plans?”

The young girl cautiously eyed him and shook her head.

Lin Jie noticed a sense of loss in the shy eyes of hers. Clearly, what this young girl just experienced had changed up dramatically and she currently had no direction.

“Since that is the case, you might need a new identity. It just so happens that I’m lacking a helper here. If you are willing, I can at least guarantee that you will be safe here.

“And if at any time you decide on doing something else, I won’t stop you from leaving.”

While Lin Jie was running an unlicensed shop, he had experience with regard to that. Getting his past customer to help create an identity was something that could be done.

“Helper?”

The girl glanced around with a wooden expression.

“Bookstore assistant, it’s rather easy. You just need to arrange the bookshelves, help with tidying, and make some records.”

In actuality... Lin Jie only had these menial tasks most of the time.

If he could hand this job over to this kid, he would be able to read his never-ending supply of books at ease.

Chapter 91 Body Temperature Of Humans

Chapter 91: Body Temperature of Humans

Just tidy and make records... Rather easy tasks?

The young girl involuntarily shuddered as she glanced at the bookshelves all around.

She was able to sense such a thick, frightening aura from merely lying in the chair. It was unfathomable to imagine what these books, shelves, and even the entire bookstore were.

She didn't even dare shut her eyes now because from what she had seen, that bone-chilling sensation would be even greater the moment she closed her eyes.

At that time, the scene in the darkness would no longer be this quaint and rundown bookstore.

She instinctively didn't want to interact closely with these things every day. Just the thought made her blood run cold.

However, if she didn't agree...

Continuing to face the Truth Union's pursuit would be the best-case scenario. Perhaps she might be fortunate enough to escape from their grasp, but the days that followed would still be filled with uncertainty.

Besides what she eavesdropped back in the laboratory, her knowledge of the outside world was basically zero.

But if she were unable to free herself from this pursuit, then perhaps... her actual life might only persist for an extra few days before coming to an end.

And when thinking more negatively, the girl might not even get to

walk out of the bookstore if she chose to decline.

As an artificial human that had just escaped her life inside culture fluid and hadn't yet experienced any complicated situation like this, the young girl's mind was at a loss.

When weighing her considerations, weren't the degree of danger from both sides roughly the same?

So much so that it seemed like staying would be the best choice.

Granted a new identity, provided with shelter. However the price was...

"I won't force you either if you aren't willing, nor will I interfere if you have your own plans." There's no need to be so uptight.

Lin Jie noticed the girl's nervousness and hesitance. Thus, he stood up and said with a smile, "There's no need to think over it too much for the time being. That can wait till your injuries get better.

"I will still take you in till your injuries are completely healed. After that, the choice to stay or leave will be entirely yours."

He helped the girl up and placed her hands on his shoulders, indicating for her to get on his back.

"Just that a new identity and perhaps the troubles that follow after have to be dealt with by yourself. After all, I am just an ordinary bookstore owner and not a charity worker."

Helping as long as it was in his means or providing counsel to customers were long-term investments to foster a closer relationship and bring about trust.

Even if they had no intention of buying books, just casual chatting would make them think about it.

In other words, all these were actually a form of equal value exchange.

However, this young girl he had picked up wasn't the same. She

wasn't a stable customer source and perhaps could bring about unforeseen troubles.

Even though Lin Jie was a kindhearted person, he couldn't just help a stranger unconditionally.

The young girl hesitated for a bit, then placed her two hands on Lin Jie's shoulders and climbed up his back somewhat shakily.

Lin Jie held on to the girl's slender legs, taking care to avoid her wounds as he headed for the stairs.

"I don't have any surplus rooms here. You can take my bed for the time being while I sleep on the recliner chair. I'll go buy a new bed tomorrow."

The young girl stared unblinkingly at the back of the man's head. The temperature of the man's body pressed against her own skin was an entirely new experience altogether.

Close, hot... I can hear his heart beating.

Upon entering the bedroom, Lin Jie suddenly sensed the girl's body tensing up slightly as her hands clutched his shoulders a little tighter.

"What's wrong?"

Lin Jie turned his head and noticed the girl's gaze was on the dream-catcher above the bed frame. Thus, with a smile, he said, "Pretty, right? That's a gift from an old customer, a local specialty that lets one have sweet dreams. It's called a dream-catcher and it's rather effective."

Sweet dreams?

Does he mean the web emanating an aura similar to that of an Abyss Predator?

Back when she was still No. 277, she had seen a piece of spider web with a similar aura in the laboratory, and it had been stored with layers of tight security installations.

Reportedly, it originated from the Abyss Predator, a dream beast capable of weaving small dream realms and possessing the power to drag beings into terrifying and delusional dreams before killing them off slowly.

Over here, it seemed to have been made into some sort of sorcery tool.

What kind of being... was this 'old customer' exactly?!

But... Regardless, how could such a strange object let people have sweet dreams? How was its effectiveness determined?!

As such thoughts went through the girl's mind, the sword lying atop the desk caught her attention.

At this time, Lin Jie explained, "And that sword is also a souvenir from a customer. It's a symbol of a family clan's glory and it's really precious."

Compared to the dream-catcher, the aura of this sword was much more proper and imposingly glorious. It was just its splendor was like a magnificent white flame that was equally as dangerous.

This sword seemed to have been casually left on the table, as if the master of the bedroom was a knight proficient in the art of killing.

Even when sleeping, his weapon would always be close, ready to be drawn at any time to behead all enemies that dare enter.

It appeared like he was setting her in his own bedroom, but it was actually a clear warning...

Lin Jie sensed the girl seemingly get tenser after his explanation and reckoned that she was probably intimidated by the new environment.

He placed her on the bed, then took out some of his spare clothes from the cabinet and handed it over.

"Relax, nobody will harm you here. Just shout for me if you are afraid."

The young girl took the clothes as she thought to herself that there weren't any 'humans' here indeed...

She raised her head and asked abruptly. "Is... Is the body temperature of humans all this hot?"

She would just treat this man as a human for the time being.

"Hot?" Lin Jie chuckled and felt her forehead. "You are just cold from losing too much blood. Remember to cover yourself with the blanket at night."

"The stuff here is only what I use. Try to make do with it for the time being," said Lin Jie as he pulled the blanket over from the side.

The girl lay down after having changed into new clothes and obediently covered herself with the blanket.

Her pair of dark eyes stared at Lin Jie, just like a newborn chick imprinting the first figure it saw into its brain.

Lin Jie kept away the sword to prevent scaring the kid. Suddenly remembering something, he turned and asked, "Since you no longer have a name, how about giving yourself a new one?"

The girl nodded.

"Any name in mind? If not, I'll help you think of one."

Lin Jie gazed out at the sky through the window. As the dark clouds covering Norzin for a month had dispersed, a bright moon could be seen.

"Mu'en (Moon), how does that sound? From today on, you will be called Mu'en."

Chapter 92 Hello, Mr. Lin

Chapter 92: Hello, Mr. Lin

Having gotten young Mu'en settled in, Lin Jie went back downstairs and firstly went to check if there were still any obvious traces at the scene where he found Mu'en.

Fortunately, the flowing floodwater that hadn't completely cleared up had washed away all the remaining blood-stains.

Lin Jie was still cautious and went to examine the surroundings. On the whole, it seemed like there wasn't anything noteworthy left behind.

This child had actually fled efficiently and Lin Jie didn't see any signs of people looking for her.

Perhaps due to the remote nature and the low number of residents on this street, Lin Jie didn't notice any others paying attention to the incident.

After the buzz from that gas explosion incident had died down and most people's curiosity had been satisfied, this place had returned back to its lonely and quiet state that didn't really attract many visitors.

Lin Jie returned and removed the blood-stained towel hanging on the recliner chair. At the same time, he dialed the only number that was saved on his communications device.

The number didn't even have a contact name, but it had been given by the first customer Lin Jie served back when he just arrived in Norzin and opened his bookstore.

It was also the same customer who helped turn his unlicensed store into one with the proper operating rights and provided a great deal of help.

And all of it had been to repay Lin Jie for recommending a book and providing her with counsel at that time.

Back then, Lin Jie reckoned he was just randomly doling out his usual chicken soup and providing some verbal solace. However, from how the customer acted after that, it seemed as if that conversation had been a life-changing affair for her.

Moreover, that had indeed been the period in which Lin Jie really required help.

Thus, when that customer treated him like a benefactor and showed her gratitude, Lin Jie chose to accept it.

Truth be told, if not for that, Lin Jie might not be recommending books and giving psychological guidance together as frequently as he did now. But, to him, being able to express two of his interests was something that made him happy.

When given the number, Lin Jie had been told that this number was on standby 24 hours a day, rain or shine. As long as Lin Jie required help, he just needed to call this number at any time and he would definitely get a reply no matter what.

And once replied, she would do her all to help Lin Jie resolve his problem.

However, in the past three years, Lin Jie had never called this number for once.

On one hand, he didn't wish to trouble others. After all, in his opinion, helping him resolve the issue of being an unlicensed store back then was already more than enough repayment for his counsel.

Secondly, Lin Jie hadn't really encountered any troubles. In these three years after transmigrating, he led an ordinary life running his bookstore, bringing warmth and care to whichever customers that came by occasionally.

But now that Lin Jie had recruited a new shop assistant, he needed to let her have peace of mind when working here.

Even though this young girl who had just gotten a new name had not explicitly stated her decision, Lin Jie was basically certain that she would definitely choose to stay.

The certainty he held had never been wrong before.

The call connected after a few moments.

An unfamiliar voice sounded. Female, respectful, yet somewhat cold that made one imagine the image of a stern matron.

“Hello, Mr. Lin.”

“Hello...” Lin Jie mulled and dredged up his memories from that distant time, trying to determine the origins of this distinctive voice. “You are the maid that came and fetched Cherry back.”

“Yes, you can call me Bella. It’s my honor to be remembered by you. For the past three years, I’ve always been waiting for your call as per the mistress’ instructions. Would you like me to inform the mistress?”

“No, no need. Let her sleep.”

After tidying up and getting rid of the blood-stained towel, Lin Jie returned from the basement and noticed the sky outside had already started to get brighter.

He had lost track of time ever since he picked up the young girl and helped her settle in. Unknowingly, the night was nearly over.

He continued tidying up whatever remaining traces in the bookstore, but the blood-stains on the recliner chair posed some difficulty. Thus, he eventually chose to give up for the time being.

Fortunately, the dark spots of blood on the already old recliner chair were not that obvious.

Bella maintained her very professional tone and said, “Very well, I’ll inform the mistress when she wakes up. May I know what your instructions are, Mr. Lin? According to the agreement, any request you have is our number one priority.”

Still as exaggerated as ever, I see...

Lin Jie reckoned that being from a merchant family that valued promises and gratefulness could explain their over-the-top commitment. Yet, he never imagined that this same attitude hadn't changed one bit even after three years.

"I've saved a young child of unknown origin... Oh, you can check the extent of the fire between Avenues 20 to 50. I will need a new cover identity for her."

"A moment, please."

Bella went silent on her end, as if she was investigating according to Lin Jie's request.

After a short while, she answered, "I understand. However, this matter is slightly sensitive so you will need to wait for a few days. Please forgive us. When the time comes, we will dispatch personnel to pay you a visit and provide assistance. We will guarantee that it is absolutely safe."

'Mm,' Lin Jie acknowledged, then followed up with a lament, "Hearing your familiar voice makes it seem like nothing has changed even though three years have passed."

Bella replied faintly, "It might indeed seem like nothing changed for you. But for us, these three years have brought about massive changes. However, the one thing that hasn't changed is our gratitude and regard towards you."

"The mistress has been thinking of you all this time and hopes to listen to your advice again. Just that, she doesn't dare make any requests because you haven't contacted us all this time."

"If you don't mind, I would like to make an arbitrary decision of requesting a visit on behalf of the mistress and hope to gain your approval."

Lin Jie felt a slight yet indescribable sense of guilt when he heard what was said.

Clearly, he hadn't wanted to inconvenience the other party, yet why did it seem like he had let down their hopes and expectations.

...Why would they be longing to be inconvenienced?

Haa, it makes no sense. Never-mind...

Lin Jie shook his head and sighed. "Of course. You all are welcome to visit my bookstore any time. Just like back then, I am also looking forward to being able to meet you and Cherry once again."

After Bella respectfully said goodbye, Lin Jie hung up his communications device. He shook his head once more. It really seemed like this young lady had really viewed him with much too high regard back then.

At such an immature and young age, overly idolizing others wasn't necessarily a good thing.

I'll need to have a good talk with her when she comes to visit.

Lin Jie kept away his communications device and watched the sky outside brighten. He was about to head out to shop for a bed when the TV next door turned on at its routine timing, revealing unfortunate news—The nearby shopping mall was temporarily closed.

Lin Jie's gaze fell on a small electric saw in the corner.

Looks like I'll have to personally get down to work...

Chapter 93 Chapman Witch

Chapter 93: Chapman Witch

Bella kept the communications device in the pocket of her maid attire and adjusted her outfit.

She stood up, eyed the large number of files on the desk before turning around and leaving the room.

Thud thud thud.

The sound of her leather high-boots on the corridor was crisp and rhythmic.

Not a single strand of her dark gray hair held by a lace headpiece was out of place. Her well-pressed black dress was fronted with a white half-apron and frills by the sides.

Her profound features and high cheekbones amplified her somewhat stern expression, making her give off the image of a diligent, reliable, and somewhat unapproachable head maid.

In actuality, her status had far exceeded that of a mere maid. Having served three whole generations of the Chapman Family, she had already become an inseparable part of the family's 'assets'.

This time-honored family clan that believed in nature was one of the most ancient Druid families and also a major shareholder of the Ash Chamber of Commerce.

Cherry Chapman, her present master, was the forerunner to succeed the family clan amongst the current generation. On top of that, she was one of the three branch heads of the Ash Chamber of Commerce.

Nobody knew how she went from being a mixed-race bastard to a powerful authoritative figure with countless fans in the span of three short years.

Some people spread rumors that she possessed the power to captivate and control the souls of others through words and hence, called her the 'Chapman Witch'.

However, as Cherry's most trusted assistant and maid who had personally brought her back to the Chapman family and witnessed her growth, Bella naturally knew of the secret behind it all.

In fact, she had just been on a call with that 'secret'.

Knock knock .

Bella knocked on her master's door, then clasped her hands before her lower abdomen and waited respectfully.

A somewhat weary yet youthful voice sounded from beyond the door. "Bella? Come in... What's the matter?"

Creak——

Bella opened the door gently and passed through the thin, formless aetheric barrier.

Exquisite curtains draped the walls of this very spacious room except for a portion where the silver Chapman Family insignia was hung. The large, soft bed was filled with all sorts of pillows, and there was a sofa and coffee table set up on top of a large wool carpet.

The young lady... or rather, the young girl sat up in bed.

The girl looked to be only about eleven years old, with her youthful and innocent charm. She had silver eyes that sparkled with a hazy and mysterious luster. Her short hair, eyelashes, and brows were pure white, completely contrasting her dark skin.

Cherry Chapman, a human druid hybrid. Even though her appearance was that of a young girl, she was actually over a century old.

Bella could see that she hadn't slept yet.

The Chapman Witch rubbed her eyes and yawned.

She was wearing a delicate, white nightgown which revealed her fine cheekbones and thin figure. Seated amongst the heap of pillows made her seem especially tiny.

Bella approached her, lifting the hem of her skirt and doing a curtsy. "My apologies for the disturbance, Mistress."

Cherry squeezed her own bulging cheeks. "What is it? I just want to go to bed."

"I'm afraid you won't be able to sleep today." Bella straightened herself and handed the communications device over. "I'm here to report that Mr. Lin has just made a call."

"What..."

Cherry was momentarily stunned and met the earnest eyes of the head maid. Then she jumped off the bed abruptly and shrieked, "He took the initiative to contact me!!!"

The young girl jumped back into bed, dove into the heap of pillows. She clutched her pillow with a flushed face and shrieked once more before biting the pillow and muttering, "Mr. Lin, Mr. Lin," while rolling about.

Bella's expression didn't change, maintaining her grace as she observed the young mistress behaving as if she was in a trance.

You look like a young girl giddy with infatuation from receiving a call from a crush rather than the authoritative figure you ought to be.

—Naturally, these words were something that she, as a professional maid, couldn't say aloud.

After rolling about till she calmed down, Cherry then sat up and put on an expressionless face. She reached out to take the communications device and asked indifferently, "What did he tell you?"

Unfortunately, her ruffled and messy hair gave her away.

Bella answered at once, “Mr. Lin has just taken in a girl and hopes that we can create an identity for her. According to my preliminary investigations added with the information Mr. Lin has provided, this girl might be related to the recent dream beast encroachment in Norzin as well as the attack on the Truth Union’s Machine Loop. More specifics can only be made clear after sending men to investigate.”

Cherry’s expression suddenly changed as she looked through the communications device in her hands. “Girl...”

Isn’t your focus entirely off?!

Bella continued, “Please forgive me, Mistress. I also made a request for you to visit Mr. Lin without your prior permission.”

Cherry stared at her and her expressionless facade fell apart. She shrieked once more and clasped the communications device tightly. “H-h-how could y-you do this? Y-y-you have clearly o-ov-overstepped your boundaries. Re-re-remember that this, I-I-I.”

Cherry’s voice died down. With a furtive look in her eyes, she whispered, “Then, did he accept?”

Bella smiled, “He did, and he expressed that he is looking forward to your arrival.”

“Ahh!!!”

The Chapman Witch clutched her heart as if she had been struck by a magic bullet. She lay on the bed, gasping for breath as she stared at the ceiling.

“Mr. Lin’s request has to be fulfilled properly. Compile information on Norzin’s happenings over this period for me. When the current auction ends and matters of the Chamber of Commerce are concluded, arrange a time to pay Mr. Lin a visit.”

Cherry’s eyes narrowed slightly as she continued, “Also, Congreve seems to be getting too close with the white magicians recently.”

“Yes, I’ll send someone to look into it. There’s no need to worry too much, Mistress. His little tricks cannot shake your position as successor.”

“Better safe than sorry. That’s the principle Mr. Lin taught me.”

Cherry revealed a slight smile, then sighed. “It’s been three years...”

Bella took the communications device back, her thoughts flashing back to the event from three years ago when she had retrieved the ‘runaway’ Cherry from that rundown bookstore. At that time, the little girl’s eyes seemed to glow when she gazed at the bookstore owner.

Bella couldn’t understand why Cherry would have such an expression back then.

But three years later, she couldn’t help but be in complete awe at how powerful and terrifying that ordinary-looking man was.

Colin shuddered as he stared in panic at the wall before him. It was as if he could see the image of the neighboring bookstore through this wall.

The shrill buzz of the electric saw from beyond the wall sounded very close.

Colin could imagine the cold glint of those sharp jagged blades spinning rapidly, ripping into flesh and spraying the entire wall with blood that dripped down to form puddles.

The sounds of the saw got closer and closer as if it was right before Colin’s eyes.

“Waa... Mama... Save me...”

Colin didn’t dare turn off the television, as if the random noises from next door gave away his last ounce of courage.

Snot dribbled down as he trembled and huddled into a ball. At this

time, he saw the screen of his secondhand communications device light up and hurriedly grabbed it with both hands.

[Listen to the Moon. The Moon will show you mercy and peace.]

s

[Your prayers have been heard by the Church of the Dome. We will proceed with an investigation. Please do not act blindly without thinking during this period.]

[Should you discover anything strange, please use the following prescription to formulate holy water. Sprinkle holy water at the door and four corners of your house every day and also pray using the corresponding incantation.] (This message is encrypted and will be destroyed after reading)

[Formula: 5g Evening Primrose, 3g Shadow Flower, 1g Pearl, 0.02g Gold Leaf, 500ml water. Mix and blend well.]

[Incantation.]

[—Vincent]

Chapter 94 Children's Edition

Chapter 94: Children's Edition

Lin Jie didn't know that his neighbor was on the verge of a mental breakdown and had even sought out a specialist to help with an 'exorcism'.

But even if he knew, Lin Jie would just probably dismiss it with a laugh and perhaps advise the other party to not waste unnecessary money, while at the same time using warm words and a reliable image to dispel any misunderstandings the neighbor might have.

At present, Lin Jie was using the small electric saw to cut through some wood he had brought up from the basement to make himself a bed.

He called it a bed, but it was actually just a couple of wooden planks nailed together to form a wooden frame, simple and crude.

Luckily, Lin Jie had taken some technical courses back in the day and his craftsmanship wasn't all that weak. The basement didn't lack tools either, otherwise, Lin Jie wouldn't even have been able to make a bed like this.

Just like this, Lin Jie squandered away a whole three hours and it was now bright enough to see the entire street outside.

Even though the weather was still slightly gloomy, the depressing rain that had gone on for an entire month had finally stopped.

Cutting out the wooden boards was just the beginning. Assembling the bed was similarly a test of physical ability.

"Huu... It's finally done." Lin Jie muttered while stretching his arms as he gazed at the finished product in satisfaction.

"It's surprisingly more tiring than I imagined."

Lin Jie wanted to rub his chin out of habit, but then realized his

hands were completely covered with fine sawdust. Thus, he clapped the dust off his hands instead and sighed, seeing the mess on the floor. “Haa... I still have to tidy it up myself...”

“Do you need help?”

Lin Jie turned towards the girl’s voice and saw Mu’en peeking out from the stairwell.

“Hmm? Can you do so ...Mu’en?”

Although taking in this assistant was to help share Lin Jie’s workload, this new assistant had just been rescued some hours ago and might still be weak. Lin Jie was worried that he might have to end up cleaning more than just sawdust.

Mu’en nodded and spent a moment in thought before she raised an arm to show a ‘flexed biceps’ pose.

The sight of her slender arm and the bandages wrapped around it made her seem rather miserable.

Combined together with her ‘everything is fine’ expression was strangely funny.

With a slight chuckle, Lin Jie instructed, “Alright then, perhaps you can help me clean up all this dust on the floor. The broom, dustpan, and trash bag are in the cupboard at the back. Be careful, don’t...”

“I won’t break anything,” declared Mu’en immediately.

Lin Jie did a facepalm and sighed, “I believe you wouldn’t either. What I meant was to be careful not to aggravate your injuries. You’ve gotta prioritize your own well-being first at all times, got it?”

“A broken broom can be replaced many times over, but there’s only one you.”

Mu’en put her hand down and contemplated rebutting with what those researchers had stated—that she could be mass-produced. However, seeing the earnest look in Lin Jie’s eyes, she suddenly

realized that there was some difference in these two meanings.

It was really different... She found it difficult to explain how she felt, but it seemed like she was once more experiencing the warmth she had felt while on Lin Jie's back.

The warmth of humans...

Mu'en nodded her head slowly, watching Lin Jie continue to fiddle with the newly-made bed before moving it upstairs.

He really was a strange man. He was clearly terrifying, but at ordinary times like this, he seemed very much like a normal person, just like Mu'en's initial judgment.

However, she definitely would not believe such a mis-perception.

Mu'en carefully walked over to the cupboard at the back.

She peered cautiously at those indescribable bookshelves that gave her the chills before picking out the cleaning tools from the cupboard.

Mu'en had observed the cleaning crew in the laboratory use such tools before, and thus knew how they were used.

She wasn't proficient at first, but slowly got the hang of it.

When the bed frame was halfway up the stairs, Lin Jie chimed, "It is fine to just call me Boss or Store Manager in future."

"Boss," Mu'en called out obediently.

When Lin Jie placed the bed frame in his room, he noticed the covers and blanket on his original bed had been folded neatly.

Haa... What a sensible kid.

After placing the prepared mattress on top, Lin Jie took a deep breath while gazing at the glimmer of sunlight coming through the windows and felt that everything was getting better.

Then, Lin Jie went down and helped Mu'en with the cleanup before giving her a simple tour of the bookstore. Lastly, he went to take a shower before opening the doors for business.

"It seems like there probably wouldn't be any customers today," muttered Lin Jie as he flipped through the register book on his usual seat at the counter.

"Oh right, in future, you would need to record down a customer's particulars, the date of borrowing, and the book title. Have a look to familiarize yourself," Lin Jie said as he handed over the register book to Moon.

The young girl accepted it stiffly and fell silent after one glance.

"What's wrong? Feel free to ask if you have any questions."

Lin Jie was prepared to start guiding this young child and wasn't yet aware of the gravity of this problem.

Only after his monologue was over did he understand that this new helper of his actually lacked any relevant knowledge.

Or rather, she lacked any formal education.

The understanding she possessed was from 'seeing' others, but there was still the lack of a systematic education.

An issue arising from a simply direct observation was that she was illiterate but could comprehend some stuff like philosophy or simple mathematical concepts.

Lin Jie rubbed his temples and felt that this matter was going to be quite the headache.

Haa... What sort of environment did this child grow up in?

Mu'en noticed his expression and pursed her lips. "I can learn."

Lin Jie sensed the girl's unrest and immediately adjusted his own facial expression. "Wanting to learn is a good thing. You are very smart and I'm sure you will pick it all up in no time," Lin Jie

consoled.

“There’s no need to rush. Your injuries would probably be healed up by the time you learn all this and helping me then would be fine.

“How about this? Read some books first and try to supplement it with whatever you’ve learned before. And if there’s anything you can’t understand, you can come ask me.”

Lin Jie got up, and after some mulling, he pulled out a children’s phonetic encyclopedia and a children’s dictionary which he proceeded to pass both to Mu’en.

The artificial young girl involuntarily flinched back when she saw the titles— Door Key: Knowledge and Sigil Fundamentals.

Lin Jie noticed her slight action and glanced at the books in his hand skeptically.

Hmm, I did take the right ones...

Then, he felt that these ‘children’s edition’ books might have hurt the young girl’s pride. Thus, he flashed a kindly smile and said sincerely, “One must learn to walk before they can run. Don’t scorn these two books for being elementary. These are all fundamental knowledge and there’s still a lot more to learn in the future.”

Chapter 95 He Has Really Thought Through This Carefully

Chapter 95: He Has Really Thought Through This Carefully

“I didn’t scorn...”

Mu’en was momentarily at a loss. She didn’t know what these two books that made her instinctively back away were, but were these really... usable books that she could learn from?

But in actuality, compared to the entire bookshelves that gave her chills, these two books in front of her seemed much more normal.

Or rather, they seemed rather alluring and brought about a desire to flip them open.

But such a sensation made Mu’en wary.

It meant that just by being there, these two books had the power to influence a person’s state of mind.

Thus, she had taken half a step back.

However, the man’s words, ‘These are all fundamental knowledge and there’s still a lot more to learn in the future,’ was a huge shock to whatever feeble knowledge Mu’en had gained in her life at the lab.

Lin Jie’s expression was serious as he had said that, and it even seemed as if he let out the aura of a university professor giving a lecture.

The sort of formidable and repressive lecturer that would go, “Students, who would like to answer this simple question? If no one raises their hands, I will randomly pick from the name list.”

Could this really be... fundamental knowledge?

Mu'en hesitated for a bit, then placed the register book down before carefully accepting the two books from the encouraging and smiling Teacher Lin.

When she took the books, Mu'en sensed a slight shudder from within her own soul.

Lin Jie patted her head with a satisfied smile. "That's more like it. Don't resist learning. Though painful, it is actually very useful. Learning is a never-ending yet readily available ladder of progress; don't view it with an opinionated attitude. A house can't just have a roof alone. It requires solid foundations and layer after layer of bricks to form a complete and sturdy house.

"Deep inside you, such a house would be the most firm of fortresses when you face any difficulties that may come your way."

Lin Jie continued on, "These are all things you would never lose that will become your greatest backing. Beyond mere worldly possessions, only your intelligence can give you self-confidence when you are down and out; it can make you retain clear-headedness in times of success."

Lin Jie gazed firmly at the young girl and put a hand on her shoulder. "This is your true power."

This time, Lin Jie wasn't imparting chicken soup but expressing his own creed and personal experience.

His life in all these three years was drastically different from before transmigrating. There were many difficulties faced that others wouldn't be able to understand. However, Lin Jie had overcome all of them and established his bookstore slowly to where it was today.

And besides the mouth of his, what he relied on more were the skills and knowledge he possessed, accumulated over the years.

With a stern expression, Lin Jie preached, "Remember, all that you gain will never be worthless. Your efforts now are for your future and provide you with much more alternatives should you ever find

yourself in a sticky situation. Got it?”

Mu'en only half understood and just nodded with a puzzled look on her tiny face. “I will study well.”

Teacher Lin retracted his hands and rambled on, “The last young customer around your age that visited my store fell in love with learning and immediately bought quite a number of books to good effect. Therefore, don't worry that you won't be able to handle it. The books she borrowed were much more advanced than yours so you'll be absolutely fine.

“As my assistant, being able to read all these books in the bookstore for free is really an amazing perk.”

Mu'en was already dizzy from Teacher Lin's sermon and could only nod her head instinctively like a little chick. Whatever he said was correct.

Lin Jie cleared his throat. “Alright, go and read. I don't think there will be any customers these couple of days. You can first learn these basics. I'll check on your progress at any time so don't goof off.”

Mu'en shifted the chair for customers to behind the counter and began her life of study.

The process of 'learning' was easier than Mu'en imagined because this artificial girl didn't have any systematic education. Thus, there was no issue of new knowledge subverting and clashing with previously fixed understandings. Thus, it was only whatever little understanding she had from before quickly combining with the influx of new knowledge.

From time to time, the young girl would glance at Lin Jie and think to herself that he had indeed been right— **Door Key: Knowledge** was indeed all about the fundamentals.

However, the scope of these fundamentals was just too huge.

Included amongst all of these were all the fundamental understanding, science, and abilities of humans as well as other nonhuman species.

The nonhuman species category included animals, plants, supernatural creatures...

If Mu'en wasn't a clean slate like she was currently, she would most likely have been overwhelmed by this large quantity of information and fall into a vegetative state.

And even though it was her, she still spent a long time in a daze before finally struggling to break free.

Mu'en then came up with a way to store this knowledge: creating a 'memory sink' within her mind to store away all this vast and complex information by categories and only retain the information she had digested.

At times needed, she could retrieve it from the 'memory sink' and that would make things much easier.

The other book, *Sigil Fundamentals*, could still be considered basics. Just that these fundamentals were the basics of white magicians.

According to the knowledge within Mu'en's memory sink, these sigils were the source of a white magician's power.

Black magician's powers came from speech, while white magician's power came from written language.

In other words, black magician's incantations corresponded to white magician's sigils.

However, developing the power of a white magician wasn't something that sole sigils could achieve. The crucial part was combining sigils.

Teacher Lin's spot checks were also on her reading ability.

Teacher Lin picked up an elementary-level language textbook, flipped to a random section, and pointed at one of the words. "What does this word mean?"

Student Mu'en raised her hand and answered, "Light and fire of a

blaze.”

Teacher Lin was momentarily stunned. He took a second look at the word he was pointing at, 'fire', and felt as if his own student had progressed from elementary level to junior high level in just a short time.

It does still seem somewhat wrong... But strictly speaking, it isn't incorrect either...

“Cough... What about this?” Lin Jie pointed at the word, 'electricity'.

“Luminescence of lightning,” Student Mu'en once again answered.

“...This?” Lin Jie pointed at the word, 'wood'.

Student Mu'en contemplated for a moment before answering confidently, “Provenance of all living things.”

Lin Jie put down the textbook and mused with lament, “Not bad, Student Mu'en. It looks like you have already grasped it entirely.”

He handed over the register book. “I can feel at ease entrusting you with the responsibility of a bookstore assistant.”

Mu'en nodded and accepted it with a straight face.

She roughly knew why she was made to learn all this... The boss had definitely noticed her fear of the shelves and books.

That meant she would be unable to properly attend to customers, so he needed to train her first, letting her get used to it and at the same time improving her ability.

Mm, he has really thought this through carefully.

Chapter 96 Central District

Chapter 96: Central District

On the third day after Lin Jie revived his teaching career by guiding Student Mu'en, he finally discovered it wasn't because he taught well, but rather, this student was just exceptionally intelligent.

To what extent was her intelligence?

In these three days, Lin Jie watched as she went from knowing nothing to having a good grasp of frequently-used English and Chinese words. She hadn't just stopped at gaining knowledge from the encyclopedia and had even taken Lin Jie's various notes that he had made on Azir people and environment when he first arrived to use as study material.

Lin Jie also didn't know how she was able to gain so much knowledge when he had merely provided her with just one encyclopedia.

...Perhaps she's really a genius.

Besides that, the rate at which Mu'en picked up skills was rapid. She could be described as a literal 'sponge' when it came to the speed at which she absorbed knowledge.

On the second night after taking her in, she helped straighten out Lin Jie's newly assembled bed and changed it from a primitive-looking bed into a normal-looking bed frame.

The clothes Lin Jie prepared for her were also remodeled into blouses and other apparel fitting herself using a needle and thread.

She had also cleaned up the bookstore once. Even though the store itself was rundown and had a permanently gloomy outlook, it now looked much neater than before.

However... When Mu'en came across the bookstore's rose, she

hesitated for a moment, then stared at it for quite some time before mentioning that she didn't know how to take care of plants.

s

This made Lin Jie heave a sigh of relief in secret.

Finally there's something that this child doesn't know....

At this time, he considered himself somewhat proficient at being a 'guardian' already.

Lin Jie walked over and rotated the flower to display its front, modestly flaunting this elegant and beautiful red rose.

Mu'en had a slightly blank expression on her face. But after glancing at Lin Jie, then the flower, she eventually nodded and said it was pretty.

Mm, that probably means admiration , thought Lin Jie to himself.

Mu'en had even self-learned nearly three hundred types of home-cooked dishes and took over the job from Lin Jie, giving him a sense of home which he hadn't experienced in a long time.

Just like this, Student Mu'en had become the 'pillar' of this home.

If Lin Jie hadn't ascertained that Mu'en hadn't been lying injured in the beginning, he would have suspected he was getting duped...

But it would also have been equally unimaginable if she had known all these from the start.

Her being a 'genius' was the only explanation Lin Jie could come up with. Fortunately, he had come across quite a number of geniuses in his life, so Mu'en's level was still considered acceptable.

After all, the talent of a genius wouldn't make sense at times.

As a 24-year-old... no, he was 21 before he transmigrated, Lin Jie had published five pieces of work and tens of related thesis and become an assistant professor while still studying his doctorate, so

Lin Jie was also called a genius by others.

But from his perspective, he reckoned it was his above-average memory and comprehensive ability as well as an outstanding mentor that allowed him to accomplish all this.

When encountering these real geniuses that defied logic, Lin Jie felt that he really couldn't be considered outstanding.

Therefore, Lin Jie could still accept the matter of him randomly picking up an exceptional genius rather well.

After all, the world was huge and possibilities were limitless.

Picking up a seemingly all-purpose assistant was a good thing, wasn't it?

However, Lin Jie's good spirits couldn't continue after a few days.

On the third day after taking in Mu'en, Lin Jie suddenly discovered that a police cordon had been set up outside when he opened for business in the morning.

"Direct jurisdiction of the Central District's Supreme Police Unit..."
Lin Jie squinted and read the tiny words printed on the yellow strip.

This meant that the cordon was under the jurisdiction of the Central District's highest law enforcement headquarters. Under most circumstances, they were the personal guards of those in power and normally wouldn't be dispatched out easily.

Clearly, the reason they were here could only be because of that exceptional fire disaster a few days back.

During these couple of days, Lin Jie seemed to have heard all sorts of news related to the fire from the news reports of the television next door.

The fire wasn't very far away from here, but it wasn't as close as the previous gas explosion which happened just a few streets away.

The damage and destruction were definitely great and the cause

was still being investigated. However, investigations had already determined two sources. One was a sewerage point many kilometers away, while another was a laboratory said to be in the Central District and was likely instigated by someone.

It was no wonder that the higher authorities were fuming over having something like this happen under their noses.

“What’s wrong?”

Mu’en stuck her head out, trying to get a look outside.

Lin Jie immediately pushed her back in and muttered, “Go back. The Central District’s Supreme Police Unit has sent people to investigate the fire, probably in a bid to track down the culprit—Have you read up on the highest law enforcement bit in my notes?”

Mu’en grunted an acknowledgment. Lin Jie turned around and half closed the door in the process.

Looking at the young girl before him, Lin Jie said, “Try not to say anything or be afraid if anyone comes over to ask questions later.”

Reaching out to hold his assistant’s hand, he continued in a gentle voice, “I’m here to deal with everything.”

Mu’en nodded, pondering for a moment before she spoke, “Their main objective shouldn’t be me.”

“It means that there’s still a small possibility that they might be looking for you. Looks like Student Mu’en is finally willing to voluntarily share some information with me now.”

Lin Jie smiled, “However, you are still considered an unregistered resident. You don’t wish to be taken away, do you?”

Mu’en’s injuries had already more or less healed up, except for the slightly deeper wounds on her nape and face that were still bandaged up.

On the surface, she looked like a mere ordinary but injured shop assistant, but she had recently learned how to conceal her own

body's aetheric fluctuations.

She didn't know how the Truth Union would determine her escape, or even if they had discovered that it was an artificial human that had escaped.

But if the Truth Union really came to investigate, their main focus would probably be searching for the person who had taken the three precious artificial human specimens. Since it was these Central District police officers that had come now, Mu'en guessed that their objective would likely be to placate residents.

s

Lin Jie was right. Her greatest worry now wasn't because of her being a supernatural being, but instead because she was an unregistered resident...

Jingle!

The bell chimed, followed by the crisp clattering of boots as three uniformed police officers entered.

Their leader seemed to be a young lad in his twenties with a hooked nose, brown hair, and blue eyes. He first surveyed the interior of the bookstore before glancing towards the counter and Lin Jie.

"Police duty. Have you seen any suspicious characters recently?"

Chapter 97 The

Chapter 97: The

The name of the young man that had entered the bookstore was Sander Lyon, a third-class police officer of the Supreme Police Unit.

Even though there wasn't any real distinction between the Upper and Central District police units, the Supreme Police Unit directly governed by the Central District was naturally of a higher grade than the periphery police units.

The Supreme Police Unit represented the will of the Central District's big shots. Those that could get posted there were either very capable or had some connections.

Thus, this led to police officers of the Supreme Police Unit having an air of natural haughtiness when they were dispatched out.

Even though it wasn't to the extent of arrogance, at the very least, they never felt like they were servicing the people of the Upper District.

The ones they served were the authority wielders and nobles of the Central District.

And only their orders would be obeyed.

Therefore, it was natural that these police officers didn't have much patience when dealing with the poor or ordinary citizens of the Upper District.

This was especially so for Lyon, who was from a noble family clan that wasn't on the decline and had their own property and business.

Moreover, those with his sort of family background would have access to some inside information— This incident wasn't something that the police unit could pursue or resolve.

Their mission was just to represent the Central District's 'strong and efficient' attitude and placate these residents of the Upper District.

In other words, just a mere formality.

Twelve hours ago, Lyon and his colleagues were still idly chatting about their plans to visit a club tonight. But in the blink of an eye, they ended up being dispatched to get tied up in this wet and dirty Upper District.

This sort of task was strenuous, unrewarding, and a huge waste of time.

Lyon just wanted to complete this pointless task and rush home for a hot shower to wash away all the dirt and mud on his body...

Lyon was even starting to feel like it was getting hard to breathe. Being wrapped by this clammy and dusty air was just like that popular food item in the Northern Highlands... *Right, just like a sticky rice dumpling!*

Heh, this goddamn assignment. I won't ever need to come back to this street and waste my time running around like a sheepdog once I get promoted to a first-class officer.

"Speaking of which, isn't this the street where the gas explosion occurred?"

Lyon's attention was captured by the 'devastation' at the side of this street when he arrived. One side of the street was just like any other disorderly street, while the other side was in complete ruins. The yellow cordon plastered around it was swaying in the wind.

One of the subordinate police officers answered, "Yes, it's the incident reported in the Norzin Daily about half a month back."

"Half a month ago?" Lyon raised his chin and said with an air of superiority, "And it's still in this state. That's just how efficient the Upper District is."

The two police officers from the Upper District exchanged glances but didn't reveal that the devastation had drawn a lot of media

coverage to satisfy the Central District's recent lack of entertainment news in the past month, leading to the reconstruction works being delayed.

It was only till Rolle Corporation got the contract recently did these works begin.

Therefore, the reason for the inefficiency at reconstructing this area was actually because of those people from the Central District.

Of course, these two didn't say anything about the matter so as to not offend this superior. Otherwise, they would suffer in the future or even lose their badge.

"Let's go on. So that means we only have to question the remaining half of the shops on this street," Lyon said in satisfaction. "This means our work gets much easier."

Truth be told, this sort of work was already undeniably relaxed.

When dispatched to the Upper District, Lyon only received looks of reverence. Those citizens would all pander to him obediently in fear of being investigated.

Just a simple question would get them to spill the beans on everything that went on in their household and Lyon was praised so much that he found it annoying.

The most ridiculous thing was the boss of an audio-visual store.

He actually claimed that the boss of the neighboring bookstore could have possibly been replaced with some sort of evil entity.

"The boss of that store is an evil spirit!

"He can pass through walls and do terrifying feats with just a thought," The middle-aged man called Colin rambled. His expression was dead serious as his voice trembled ever so slightly. "A few days ago, in the wee hours of the morning, I heard him using an electric saw... maybe it was to cut human bones or flesh. It was extremely frightening and he was even laughing maniacally. I think that he might try to kill me at any time..."

One of the police officers commented jokingly, “Perhaps you should seek out the church to settle your problem.”

“I’ve already done so!” Colin felt exasperated towards the three officers staring at him as though he was a retard. “Father is already on the way. He will come to help me out!”

“Alright, alright. Then just wait for the Father to come. This concludes our questioning.”

Clearly, the police officers treated this as a joke.

At first, Lyon still retained some vigilance, but when he asked Colin for evidence, this fellow had babbled nonsense about how the next-door boss absolutely had to be avoided, otherwise great misfortune would befall him.

This made Lyon suspect that this person’s brain was wonky.

“That’s just how people in the Upper District are...” muttered Lyon, shaking his head as he led his subordinates out.

He then glanced towards the bookstore next door.

He didn’t know whether it was due to the babbling nonsense of Colin, but at this moment, Lyon sensed an indescribable allure coming from this rundown shopfront.

Whether it was the bronze bell hanging on the door or the dust-coated windows at the side.

Lyon told himself that this was just routine business and headed inside.

The bookstore owner seated behind the counter was even younger than he imagined. But unexpectedly, there was a store assistant at his side.

The store assistant appeared to be quite a young girl. There were some bandages wrapped around her face and body, seemingly recent injuries.

“I remember that the shop’s information only showed one owner,” Lyon said as he glimpsed through a file with basic information of all these shops.

The bookstore owner nodded and replied naturally, “She’s an assistant I just hired. Business has gotten busy recently and I can’t manage all by myself.”

“Is that so? May I request for her identification documents or proof of residence? We have to make a record.”

“That might be a little problematic,” said the bookstore owner. “She’s the daughter of a friend’s relative and recently relocated from the Central District to here. I think you all should know how complicated the procedures of voluntarily converting from a noble family to an ordinary resident can be. It’s currently still in processing so all the documents have been handed over at present.”

“Oh... I’ve heard about situations like this before. But, what’s up with the injuries on her body?”

“For that, I will have to talk about the extent of their family clan’s decline...”

The bookstore owner cleared his throat, seemingly appearing like he was going to narrate a very long story.

The two police officers standing in front of the counter braced themselves, but their eyes were mesmerized by the brilliant red rose.

Lyon went deeper inside to survey the surroundings while casually remarking, “By the way, your next-door neighbor seems to have some prejudice against you. He thinks you are some sort of evil spirit.”

s

The bookstore owner was taken aback. “Evil spirit? I never knew that he actually viewed me this way. I previously helped him with some stuff but I never expected him to have such a great misunderstanding. How strange, he would know if he just thinks for

a bit. How can I be an evil spirit?”

Lyon halted in his tracks as he suddenly spotted the faint, mottled blood-stains on the recliner chair.

A bone-chilling sensation suddenly came over him. He turned back abruptly only to see his two fellow officers had rooted on the spot as the flesh-and-blood-like petals of the counter-top’s rose bloomed, revealing a spiral of fine teeth and its sinister eyeball.

The bookstore owner behind the counter revealed a wide smile.

“I am... a real living person!”

Chapter 98 Are They Alright?

Chapter 98: Are They Alright?

“I am... a real living person!”

The bookstore owner smiled kindly at the three police officers with a slight hint of exasperation at being misunderstood.

“You...” Lyon gulped as a numbing sensation crept over him. This scene before him that went against logic made him feel as if his mind was being yanked around.

It felt as if his skull was being pried open and his brains forcefully being stirred by something.

A wave of nausea hit him as his pupils contracted. He felt his vision starting to whirl, and all that remained was that smiling face and the 'open-mouthed' rose.

In this indefinite span of time, the bookstore owner's face gradually became blurry and distant.

The gaping mouth full of sharp fine teeth got wider and wider. Flesh petals that were almost within reach and the squirming eyeball staring at Lyon were all that he saw.

Lyon's last bit of consciousness was frantically howling— *You are not human! You're lying! How can you even be a real living person?!*

He could even vaguely see the panic on the faces of the other two officers and sense their inner fear.

It was as if there was a straw connecting the three of them and sucked out their thoughts, blending all of it together while at the same time forming a unique 'mixture' that allowed a temporary confluence of their hallucinations and thoughts.

Fear, panic, despair, shock, loss, hysteria...

All of it was interwoven and dissolved together.

However, this otherworldly sensory experience only persisted for a brief moment before they started being 'absorbed'.

Vaguely hearing the sounds of chewing and guzzling, his perceptive consciousness began to break down and a sense of emptiness started to take root.

Clubs, parties, and other desires he owned started to vanish...

Work, family... His own aspirations followed shortly after.

Jingle —

The bronze bell on the bookstore's door rang out once more.

"What are you all doing?"

A forceful and slightly stern voice of a stranger sounded, and like a hammer, it shattered the formless barrier.

The flower with layers of blood and flesh within his vision instantly retracted, turning back into the form of an ordinary rose.

Krrack... It was like the sound of glass cracking.

Lyon regained control of his rigid limbs and frozen senses as the world before him returned back to normal.

However, his body was drenched in cold sweat. He staggered back, panting heavily as if he was gonna collapse from fear.

Thump! Thump!

Lyon's two subordinates fell on their butts and backed away limply, their faces ashen with despair.

The expression they had was as if all hope of living was gone.

While backing away, they tried their best to seemingly clamber up and run out while muttering incoherently, "No! Don't come any closer!"

Lyon's mouth went dry at this sight and his forehead was riddled with sweat.

This was no hallucination.

The three of them had nearly been 'devoured' by that strange flower just moments ago.

But why did it seem like his two subordinates had it worse?

As this thought went through his mind, Lyon suddenly felt his chest burning. He reached in and pulled out the necklace he had worn since young. This necklace was said to have been handed down through generations within his family and the pendant was inscribed with some unknown language.

At present, the letters appeared in burnt black and felt scorching to touch. Following that, the words on the pendant rapidly vanished, leaving behind just a smooth metallic appearance.

“...”

A vague snapping sound was heard as the metal pendant split in half.

Lyon clutched this heirloom pendant in befuddlement. He turned his gaze fearfully to the bookstore owner as if seeing a ghost, or an evil spirit.

Oh god! That audio-visual store boss was speaking the truth!

No! No no no! This fellow is a hundred times, no, a thousand times scarier than an evil spirit! Just a flower of his is a 'man-eater'!

Lyon felt a part of him had been 'eaten' but he couldn't pinpoint what exactly. All he felt was that his future had already experienced a severe change...

In the midst of his panic, he noticed the young man whose voice he had heard, which had fortunately halted the flower's devouring process.

He was a handsome young man with golden hair and blue eyes. A black windbreaker and long trousers made up his attire. Deep-set features like a marble sculpture gave him an air of natural righteousness and his eyes shone with a certain brilliance.

He stopped the two 'possessed' officers that were trying to escape frantically before knocking them out cold. Then, he calmly leaned them on the wall to the side before standing back up.

This chain of action and his image were just too brilliant.

It was exactly the same as when a savior appeared to save the day at the final crucial moment in a movie.

Lyon felt as though he had been 'rescued'.

But after three seconds in a daze, he realized that this young man looked somewhat familiar...

The more Lyon looked at him, the more that man seemed familiar.

Lyon racked his brains. A flash of lightning zipped across his muddled consciousness and he finally remembered— This was the young police captain that was newly promoted in recent years.

Claude. Yes, Lyon remembered that his name was Claude.

It was said that he was a commoner that started from nothing, purely relying on his own ability to garner continuous promotions. And it just so happened that the peak of his career coincided with the time when the Central District authorities decided to appoint an important position in the Upper District.

Lyon couldn't help thinking about the social events which he attended frequently. Sooner or later, this young talent with his status and recognition could...

Then, he watched as his 'savior', the young high-ranking police captain, shot him a look, sighed, and turned towards that 'evil spirit' and bowed formally.

"Hi, Mr. Lin. My name is Harry Claude, Joseph's disciple and a first-

class police captain of the Central District. My teacher sends his regards.”

Thump!

Lyon could no longer take the shock anymore and fainted, crashing to the floor instantly.

Lin Jie’s lips twitched slightly as he glanced at the three police officers lying down.

“Are they alright?” Lin Jie asked with concern.

Scared witless from a chance encounter with their superior...

He couldn’t help muttering, “Aren’t they a little too timid...”

Claude maintained his smile, glanced at the still rose which seemed to be belching in secret, and thought to himself, *How are you less self-aware than Teacher himself?*

However, from his experience dealing with his own teacher, Claude replied calmly, “It shouldn’t be too much of a problem. They just need a few months to recover and I’ll just let them have a vacation. Please don’t worry about their mental and physical health.”

Chapter 99 Modest And Low

Chapter 99: Modest and Low

Since their superior said so, then they should really be fine.

Lin Jie heaved a sigh of relief. “That’s good to hear.”

As if!

Claude was well aware that these three were in deep trouble. There was no way they could still retain a normal mental state after recuperating for a few months or even for the rest of their lives.

Just from their outward appearance, the two police officers he had knocked out would forever have a deep-rooted fear as well as a majority of their desires stripped away.

The other officer, Sander Lyon of the Lyon family, seemed to be in slightly better condition, but Claude wasn’t sure exactly which part of him had been stolen away.

And this included Claude’s timely interruption. Had Claude been any later, there would have been three mindless zombies lying on the ground.

This especially beautiful-looking rose on the counter-top was an extraordinary plant species once cultivated in the ancient elf kingdom. It was known as ‘Seed of Desire’.

It didn’t have a fixed appearance and could take on the shape of any sort of plant based on the desires of its planter.

But it was inherently an extremely invasive organism that fed on desires. As it had intelligence close to the level of a small dog, it was also occasionally kept as a pet.

These plants could become stronger by the desires they absorbed. Furthermore, the grades of ‘Seed of Desire’ were also dependent on their lineage and nurturing.

This particular plant before him was of a very high grade.

Claude himself didn't know this ancient plant's species. Other scholars had research expertise in this area, but very few people knew about this ancient species.

This was important information that Joseph had specifically briefed Claude about.

To prevent him from accidentally offending the bookstore owner or getting hurt by some things within the bookstore, the former Great Radiant Knight Joseph had spent a great effort in instructing him.

In actuality, Claude didn't become a victim, but he had now become an eyewitness.

His heart sank with a thud when he heard that the Central District's Supreme Police Unit was conducting a large-scale questioning and immediately rushed over. However, he expected to still be late.

Secret Rite Tower hadn't set any restrictions on this district so as to not 'disrupt' the bookstore owner or upset him.

According to professional assessor Caroline's analysis, the bookstore owner had a rather mild temperament and most inquiries wouldn't affect him negatively.

However, Claude, who was a part of the organization itself, knew exactly how the Supreme Police Unit could be like.

That's right. In the world of transcendent beings, Claude was a Pandemonium-rank knight of Secret Rite Tower, Joseph's disciple and assistant, as well as the Deputy Section Chief of the Intelligence Department.

But in the world of ordinary beings, his identity was a young and talented first-class police captain within the Central District's Supreme Police Unit that had relied on his own ability to rise through the ranks.

The convenience of this identity made it much easier for him to collect information for Secret Rite Tower.

Even though he didn't know how these police officers had offended the bookstore owner, it was fortunate that the owner just treated them as playthings to while away time.

This was merely a Seed of Desire guzzling their desires with no intention of causing any additional harm.

Claude once again raised his own vigilance, alarm sirens ringing in his heart.

Even though the bookstore owner was assessed as friendly, Supreme-rank beings couldn't be perceived using human standards and ethics.

A friendly joke—like the one now, to just 'scare them a little'— was capable of causing irreversible damage to ordinary people.

When dealing with such an entity, there were extreme limitations to what they could do.

But as a knight of Secret Rite Tower, it was their duty to help even if there were restrictions.

Claude looked towards the bookstore owner and said, "I apologize on their behalf if they did anything impolite."

Lin Jie shrugged it off. "It's not a big deal. They were just doing some routine questioning, just that my assistant's identity is being processed, so they asked a few more questions."

Claude turned to give his regards to the young girl standing silently at the side and made a mental note that the bookstore now had a store assistant.

As for a detailed inquiry...

The bookstore owner made it clear that 'her identity is being processed', which explicitly meant not to ask about it.

He didn't want to walk down the same path those three others did.

Naturally, Lin Jie wouldn't do anything to Joseph's disciple for he

was a potential new customer after all.

But to think that Joseph's disciple was actually a first-class police captain of the Central District's Supreme Police Unit. This really surprised Lin Jie.

However, when he thought about the sword given by Joseph, Lin Jie knew that he definitely wasn't any ordinary veteran officer, and having a high-ranking disciple was rather reasonable.

Meanwhile, Mu'en took the initiative to pour hot water into two cups and pushed one towards Claude who had taken a seat on the counter's other side.

Lin Jie saw this and nodded, thinking to himself that this assistant was a worthy pick up.

Without having to do everything himself made him finally feel like a boss.

Lin Jie took a sip of tea and cleared his throat. "By the way, you probably came to find me for a different matter, right? How has Joseph been doing recently? He seems to be much more relaxed after he gave me the sword."

Since he was Joseph's disciple and had stated himself sending regards on behalf of his teacher, that meant that he had been sent here by Joseph.

However, Lin Jie couldn't help feeling that Claude was like a child being forced to visit and pay respect to elders during Chinese New Year.

Claude thanked Mu'en as he took the cup before he nodded. "Teacher sent me here to express his gratitude. He's been very good recently and it seems like he's showing signs of great advancement."

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow. "Then, I guess I have to express my congrats. Having a breakthrough at such an age isn't easy indeed."

Haa... I never expect Old Man Joseph to see the light that quickly. It's

not easy to improve one's state of mind without some experiences. Looks like putting down that sword has really enlightened him.

Claude went on, "It's all thanks to your help that Norzin's safety levels have gone up considerably."

Since the bookstore owner didn't even reveal himself on that day, it meant that he probably didn't want anyone to know...

Claude probed cautiously, but deep down, he was rather certain of the truth. After all, it was only the demon sword Candela which Joseph gave away that could be linked to the ancient elf king.

Lin Jie blinked several times. *What has Norzin's safety levels got to do with me?*

But when Lin Jie thought back on Joseph's initial absolute abhorrence towards evil and the 'great advancements' he made after receiving guidance, Lin Jie was certain that Joseph had once more regained his sense of justice.

Just that this time it likely wasn't his obligation but genuine interest instead.

Thus, he chuckled, "Nahh, the one who truly put in effort was Joseph. All I did was slightly guide him in the right direction."

Indeed!

Claude had gotten his answer without any suspense. The one who acted on that day was the bookstore owner.

Using the demon sword Joseph had passed on to him as a sorcery tool, the bookstore owner had summoned the ancient martyr to accomplish the feat of god-slaying. Thus, he had said it was Joseph who did all the work.

The bookstore owner is being modest and keeping a low profile indeed, thought Claude to himself.

He then pulled out a thick stack of documents, placing them on the table as he declared his main objective for coming over today.

“Teacher personally went through the archives and got these resources of ancient lost languages which said you talked about wanting before. However, because these languages were from a long time ago, the research progress of these documents is rather sluggish. There isn’t too much reference material and only some original text from stone slabs. Hopefully, these will be of use to you.”

Chapter 100 It

Chapter 100: It

Lin Jie's eyes lit up.

Resources related to lost languages of Azir!

Previously when Joseph had given him that heirloom sword, Lin Jie was intrigued by the inscriptions on the blade and had casually mentioned it.

Following that, Joseph suggested helping search for some resources, yet Lin Jie hadn't expected a result that quickly.

Joseph is reliable indeed!

Lin Jie reached over for the stack of notes and did a quick flip through. He immediately understood why Claude had said that 'the research progress was slow.'

The thick stack was largely records and stone rubbings of some original text. Only a few thin papers at the back were the research results of later generations. Moreover, this research didn't follow any set rules.

It felt as though a bunch of different people had researched separate portions and mashed them up together.

No matter how Lin Jie looked at it, the research was merely a bunch of 'guesses' and 'conjectures.' The actual translated portions were few and far between.

During this quick scan-through, Lin Jie ascertained one thing—the majority of these archivers and translators that very likely the people who had unearthed these historical remnants weren't professional academics.

It didn't mean to say that there were no academics amongst those that had unearthed these remnants, just that the documents were

disorderly. It seemed as if these people had casually written down their thoughts after receiving the stone rubbings before setting them aside and not doing any follow-ups.

If it were later generation academics that wrote down all these, Lin Jie was certain that they wouldn't have let these studies come to an end so abruptly, unless they encountered special circumstances.

Otherwise, the only other way to describe this was bad professionalism.

But excluding all these scrap research notes, what remained was approximately 12 pages of stone rubbings. This was an unexpectedly abundant quantity and Lin Jie felt gratified.

Lin Jie tidied up the documents and placed them on the table before smiling at Claude. "Coming over specifically to send this must have tired you out. Do you want to rest for a bit and maybe read some books? I can recommend a few."

Claude already expected the bookstore owner to say something like this. He glanced at the bookshelves and the shadows hiding behind Lin Jie and hesitated for a bit.

"Thanks for your kind offer, but I still have to deal with these three impertinent fellows and can't spare some leisurely time at the moment."

Claude gestured at the three police officers lying on the ground, indicating that he would very much like sitting down to read some books, just that he couldn't spare the time to do so now.

He declined not because he knew what was good for himself, but rather, he was abiding by his teacher's instructions.

Claude knew that the books within the bookstore weren't that simple, and he also knew how powerful the owner was. However, he had to consider whether he himself could handle the bookstore owner's gift.

His teacher's daughter had recently fallen into an uncontrollable studying mode and had no way of stopping herself as a result of a

book from this bookstore. Had it not been for Joseph's forceful interruption, who knew what disastrous consequences might have occurred...

Fortunately, Melissa had fainted due to the lack of food and sleep at that time. But even so, she had been confined to the bed for an entire week and was still recuperating.

On top of that, there seemed to be some slight changes in her character.

Even though his teacher said that the benefits Melissa gained far outweighed the price, Claude still couldn't stop himself from the subconscious sense of dread and trepidation.

Thus, before coming here, Joseph had taught Claude that he could try to tactfully decline if the bookstore owner tried to recommend some books.

And if he had no option but to accept, Claude needed to proceed with extreme caution, ask about the use of the book, and open it with the owner present. Alternatively, he could bring it back and run through it together with his teacher.

Under no circumstances was he to read it alone in private.

"Ahh, that's a real pity. Another time perhaps."

Lin Jie found it regrettable but he didn't show it. He glanced at the three police officers on the ground once again and shook his head.

"But to be honest, this is the worst batch I've seen... Your Central District Police Unit should really raise the recruitment standards and overall quality."

This batch?

Claude caught these important words. That means that the bookstore owner had interacted with Central District Police in the past.

He made a mental note of this new information.

“You are right, I will bring this up to the higher-ups,” said Claude with a nod of his head.

“Aside from that, feel free to contact me if you have any other requests. This is my number.”

“Definitely.” Lin Jie gave the usual polite formalities as he added a new number to his rarely used communications device.

Claude noticed a vague druid insignia on the back of the bookstore owner’s communications device.

From the known information, this bookstore had been under the Ash Chamber of Commerce’s banner. Moreover, it had been exactly three years... Three years ago was the time when the Chapman family took back that ‘half-breed’.

If nobody knew about the existence of this bookstore, then the ‘Chapman Witch’ would really remain an unsolved mystery.

But joining up the dots now made everything clear at once.

So, the bookstore owner’s influence started three years ago. And who knows how many chess pieces he has scattered in these three years...

Claude felt his throat tightening slightly. The fortunate thing was that inclusive of Wilde, there currently weren’t too many people that knew about the existence of this bookstore.

Even those at the Truth Union were still in the stage of unawareness.

This is a good thing... Secret Rite Tower’s decision to blockade out this information was just too timely.

When the Truth Union faces a divide in the future, they hopefully will not choose to court disaster. After all, Secret Rite Tower had already given sufficient warnings.

“Oh right.” The bookstore owner suddenly looked up and broke Claude’s train of thoughts.

Claude immediately sat straighter. “Do you have any other instructions?”

Lin Jie chuckled seeing the look on the face of Joseph’s disciple. Both of them seemed like they were of similar ages, yet the other party appeared to treat Lin Jie as an elder...

Haa... But such a misunderstanding is reasonable since I know his teacher.

“Don’t be so nervous. It’s not like I eat people.” Lin Jie jested to lighten the mood before asking, “How’s Melissa? Has she been studying?”

“I’m talking about your teacher’s daughter. Previously, she was probably at loggerheads with Joseph when she came over to arm wrestle with me and ended up buying a few reference books home.

“Now that I think about it, that might be a little too difficult for her current level. I hope that her studying is going fine.”

She’s having some difficulty indeed... She’s already been lying in bed for a week. As for whether you eat people or not? I think the three fellows lying here know best...

Claude cursed silently, then politely replied, “Thank you for your concern. She’s deeply engrossed with studying. Even though she’s recently been unwell, her progress has been evident.”

“That’s good. Tell her that she has to keep a proper balance between work and rest to achieve the best results,” said Lin Jie.

“I’ll pass on your message.” Claude heaved a sigh of relief. Melissa would probably listen since it was the bookstore owner that had said this. “I’ll be taking my leave first if you don’t have other instructions.”

Having gotten a nod from the bookstore owner, Claude stood up and carried the three disoriented police officers out of the bookstore.

Volume 2

Chapter 101 The Last Ghost

Chapter 101: The Last Ghost

Lin Jie waved at Claude with a slight smile on his face.

Once the door shut once more, his gaze fell onto that somewhat thick stack of resources on the counter-top.

Ever since he transmigrated, Lin Jie hadn't come into touch with such things in a long time. Stuff like ancient vestiges, traveling to remote villages, sorting out research data, and a hectic life running about had already become distant memories.

Besides the initial period after transmigration where he wanted to learn more about Azir's history and customs in order to adapt to life here, Lin Jie hadn't done anything else related to his own profession since then.

Helping the elf miss reconstruct the significance of her house's armorial was one thing, but Lin Jie hadn't officially started and was still in the preparatory phase.

He still had to wait for Doris to return from her family clan and provide him with the necessary related information.

After all, Lin Jie was still a stranger in a strange land and didn't have things that he could research on even if he wanted to. But now, Claude had brought him some good stuff.

Lin Jie reached out to gently straighten the papers and felt much merrier.

Since Joseph's disciple was a first-class police officer and the issue with Mu'en's identity had been explained to him in person, Lin Jie believed that there wouldn't be any more worrying incidents like the one today at least till Mu'en's new identification from the Ash Chamber or Commerce is sent over.

These were the benefits of having connections.

Indeed, Lin Jie had to continue with his daily practice of doling out chicken soup, aiming for the long time and hooking in big fish. Only then could there be sustained development and he could squeeze... no, utilize every customer's resources and make it mutually profitable for all parties.

"What are these?" Mu'en came over and eyed the research resources curiously.

The artificial young girl had an innate inquisitiveness from the beginning. The large quantity of knowledge she had been gaining recently made her aware of her initial blank state and this made her start to thirst for even more knowledge.

"Resources pertaining to a lost Azir language from ancient times. It's also the same language as the inscriptions carved on the sword in my bedroom."

Lin Jie poked Mu'en's forehead with his index finger and feigned a solemn look. "This isn't stuff you ought to look at. You haven't reached this level yet. You wouldn't want to have your head spin from looking at this and faint on the spot like those three fellows just now."

Mu'en clutched her forehead and groaned. Recalling the sensation of everything that she knew being rewritten made her take a step back involuntarily.

But because Lin Jie had mentioned the inscribed carving on the sword, Mu'en subconsciously recalled the sword inscription that she had seen.

From her peripheral vision, the characters on the research notes seemed to have some relation with the inscription on the sword. Through those indescribable characters, she vaguely sensed a ghost belonging to a long-destroyed civilization.

Remnants of an entire era, and countless bits and pieces of information flitted across her eyes in an instant.

Though only a moment of insight, it was enough to shock her.

Mu'en remained in a daze for a while, aware that this wasn't something that could be seen. This mere interaction made her feel as if illusions were coming to life. Who knew what would happen if she spent an extended period staring into it.

She quickly picked up the tea set and plodded upstairs to wash the cups.

"Remember to bring the sword and my notes on the table down!" Lin Jie called out, then sighed as he watched her slender back view disappear.

"Does she have to be that frightened? Still a kid indeed... She's very talented, but in the end, still afraid of learning.

"Haa... She will be really grown up the day she suggests studying on her own accord.

"When that time comes, I wouldn't just have a bookstore assistant, but a research assistant as well."

Lin Jie shook his head ever so slightly as he glanced at the yellow police cordon swaying in the wind outside.

He guessed that there probably wouldn't be any more customers for the day given the circumstances and thus, went over to shut the door and flip the sign over to 'closed'.

Lin Jie returned to his seat behind the counter, turned on the desk lamp, and started to go through these research notes thoroughly.

The documents that Joseph sorted out included a copy of the original text, relevant research notes as well as related material. Altogether, there were 21 pages of the original text, 15 pages of relevant notes, and... only the name of a book for related material.

It was clear that this language hadn't undergone an in-depth study.

Lin Jie first read the documents written by his predecessors.

There were only two researchers by the names of 'Pritt Hall' and 'Trollope Rupert', while the original text had four different segments.

Rupert's research was all the three segments pertaining to history, which Lin Jie labeled as 'Religious Fanaticism', 'Rise of the Kingdom', and 'Homomorphic Revenge'. Hall's study was on the remaining and scattered segment, 'Customs'.

After eliminating much of the pointless views, there were only three main points of useful information.

First, these ancient scripts were unearthed from some ruins in the Lower District and dated back to the ancient Azir's second era, which was also the Alford's Kingdom during the period of darkness.

And what these ancient scripts recorded were about that lost period of history.

Second. The rough details uncovered by the two researchers were astonishingly similar to what Lin Jie had previously seen in his dream.

The descent of a 'god' leading to worship and fear, the rapid rise of the Alford's Kingdom, up to the point where the final generation of the Alford's king challenged this 'god' which eventually led to him perishing alongside his kingdom.

There were even examples of customs such as 'Ceremonies in the huge white hall' and 'Laurel worn by the king'.

This was entirely the life of the elf king Candela that Lin Jie had experienced in his dream.

Thirdly, the title of the book was called ***Period of Darkness: Rise and Fall of Alford's***. Currently, it was preserved by an organization known as the Truth Union. However, those two researchers weren't able to obtain access to it.

Lin Jie kneaded his temples. This was beyond his expectations.

A prophetic dream? Or is this purely a déjà-vu?

But everything in the dream was still clear in his memory and these resources couldn't be falsified either.

Back when Lin Jie had received the sword, he could immediately discern that the inscription was of an ancient Azir language because he had seen similar characters during his own study on Azir when he first arrived here.

Most of the resources he got back then were provided by the Ash Chamber of Commerce and couldn't be fake either.

It seemed like only by getting his hands on the ***Rise and Fall of Alfords*** would Lin Jie get one step closer to know what exactly was going on.

Lin Jie only realized that Mu'en had already placed the sword beside him after he had put down the documents.

He picked up the sword, scrutinizing its shimmering mirror-like blade, then the inscription on it.

He had kept away the sword ever since he rescued Mu'en in order to not scare her and hadn't gotten a good look at it for some time.

It had been a few days since Lin Jie had woken up from the dream where he had slain the 'god'.

As he gazed at the sword for the first time since then, a sudden sense of familiarity flowed into his mind.

Involuntarily, he understood that the words carved on the sword read " *At the end of the long night, thou become the light .*"

As well as the significance of those stone rubbings.

What Hall researched wasn't any 'Customs', but the ceremony for passing on the sacred sword.

As if a valve was turned on, Lin Jie once again sensed the existence of Candela. His reversed image on the blade suddenly became the gorgeous elf king with flowing golden hair and olive-green eyes.

This was Alford's last ghost's final gift before withering away—His pure soul.

Chapter 102 Vincent Was Rushing Over

Chapter 102: Vincent Was Rushing Over

The apparition on the sword blade only flashed for a split moment.

With the glimmering of light, the reverse image of Candela vanished without a trace.

However, Lin Jie was absolutely certain he wasn't seeing things.

Was that... an apparition?

He leaned back, calmly swiveling the sword, and once again scrutinized the inscription carved on the blade, the indescribable sensation of familiarity not diminishing in any way.

A deluge of information flooded his mind, as if it were things that he ought to have known.

Stuff like how this sword was supposed to have been embedded in the central point of the massive white hall, and how the Alford's sacred sword together with the laurel crown were the symbols of royalty.

Previously, when Lin Jie woke up from that dream, gazing at this sword made it seem as if he had personally wielded this sword to countless battlefields...

Right now, this no longer seemed like a mis-perception because Lin Jie had even grasped an unknown language that he had no prior experience with before.

Lin Jie knew that perhaps there might be a logical explanation for these circumstances, for example, savant syndrome.

However, he hadn't been hit on the head recently and believed his own brain functioned perfectly fine.

Moreover, the premise for suddenly understanding a language had to be coming from learning or coming in contact with this language in the past. Thus, this sort of reasoning didn't seem applicable.

Lin Jie suddenly remembered that Candela had given him one thing back then— *A laurel!*

He glanced at his wrist but didn't see anything strange.

"Right... if it were there, I would have already noticed it in the past couple of days."

Lin Jie rubbed his wrist, not knowing whether to heave a sigh or feel regret.

"Did I unintentionally 'transcend' him?"

"Given how Candela was, he might be the manifestation of a ghost attached to the sword due to his obsession and not the simple dream which I thought it was.

"Hmm... Perhaps after being passed down for a long time, this sacred sword of the Alford's Kingdom became an heirloom for Joseph's family. Or maybe his family had the mission of guarding this sword, preventing the ghost from interfering with the human realm, just that Joseph forgot about it. And after it was passed down to me, Candela had the power to influence my dreams.

"But he seems rather friendly, and whatever deep-rooted resentment would have been worn away over time and all that remained was cured by my chicken soup for the soul."

Lin Jie gazed at the sword in hand and continued musing, "In the end, the most important thing Candela gave me wasn't the sacred sword or the laurel crown, but the experience of his entire life in the dream..."

This ghost from ancient times had chosen to pass down everything about his kingdom through such a method.

"The only question is, how much of the dream was true..."

Lin Jie recalled the process of how the young Candela learned all sorts of knowledge and swordsmanship from the royal teachers, but some of those ‘mystical arts’ as well as the period where he challenged the ‘god’ was still rather fuzzy.

This might mean to say that Azir once had an age of mythology, but all of these had vanished following the death of that ancient kingdom.

Or perhaps, all of these things had been hidden away.

*Looks like I have to get my hands on **Rise and Fall of Alford**s ...* Lin Jie thought to himself while rubbing his chin.

Just that... where could that scholarly organization I’ve never heard of be?

Colin carefully took out the allocated bottle of ‘holy water’ and sprinkled some at the door and four corners of his unit.

He took a deep breath, the light fragrance of the holy water lingering in his nose. He silently recited the incantation while reaching out his right hand to his forehead to form a three-point arc to his chest.

—This was the Church of the Dome’s prayer posture, symbolizing the protection of the moon.

“O Holy Moon, I thank thee...”

Having finished it all, Colin exhaled, feeling much better both in spirit and mind.

It was all thanks to Father Vincent’s holy water recipe that Colin was able to feel less anxious and sleep much better the past couple of days.

Colin’s face twitched slightly.

The only disadvantage was that it was a little expensive.

But everything had been worth it.

“I wonder how those blockheads are doing. How dare they ignore my advice and call me a loony! I’ll let them witness my prowess in a bit...” Colin grumbled as he peeked out of a small crack in the shop window, ever so slightly having mixed feelings.

A part of him wanted those three prideful fellows to be taught a lesson, and at the same time, a part of him really hoped that they could resolve this situation.

If those police officers from the Central District Police Unit could use their haughty ‘air of superiority’ to get rid of the evil spirit next door... Colin really wouldn’t mind being a loony for this once.

They definitely brought guns... Slay that terrible evil spirit! Don’t let him terrorize me anymore, please!

Colin slightly lifted up the blinds and watched the entrance of the next-door store.

However, he witnessed another golden-haired young man coming out with the three police officers slumped over his shoulders.

Their heads were drooping and it wasn’t clear whether they were out cold or drugged.

That golden-haired man seemed to carry an aura of justice with every single movement of his. Colin had seen people like this before, though just on television. Thus, he was certain that this young man was also from the Central District.

However, the young man seemed to have a look of reverence on his face as he carried these fellows that had certainly been tortured by that demonic fellow!

“Oh god, how can someone from the Central District Supreme Police Unit be like this! What sort of bearing is that... His people are clearly hurt and he isn’t doing any questioning? He’s surely being controlled!”

Colin shuddered and shut the blinds urgently, then ran over to pick

up his holy water and sprinkled it all over the window vigorously.

“O Holy Moon, please protect me! Listen to my prayers, give me... Father Vincent, where is he?! Hurry up and save me!”

Vincent was currently rushing over.

He glanced at the address displayed on his communications device, confirming that he would reach his destination in approximately six kilometers, and heaved a sigh.

It just so happened that the diocese recently had a new apostle ordained, and the priests of each parish had to head forth to receive the new apostle’s teachings and baptism. As such, Vincent had delayed numerous calls for help and could only provide guidance and aid in the form of text messages.

Fortunately, he had rushed back now and could still make it in time to perform an exorcism.

At the same time, he couldn’t help feeling a little worried.

“Hopefully it’s a real evil spirit haunting this time... and not the hallucinations of some nutcase having trouble sleeping.”

In a month, he would receive four to five calls for help within the parish, but among them, the actual evil spirit cases were a tenth or lesser.

Thus, he had adopted the practice of first providing a recipe for holy water to the devotees seeking for help.

Holy water did drive away evil spirits, but the main use was more of a placebo to help improve one’s quality of sleep...

It was very effective. After a couple of usages, many of these help-seekers would think that the evil spirits haunting them were gone, which led them to praise Father Vincent’s exorcising abilities to the high heavens.

Chapter 103 Witching Period

Chapter 103: Witching Period

Vincent wasn't necessarily the strongest priest in this parish.

After all, his ability was only at Abnormal-rank and he wasn't adept in combat and other such aspects.

However, he was the one with the most fame and highest reputation.

There were many reasons, but mainly it was Vincent's special edition 'holy water' that he got those help-seekers to sprinkle around their house daily.

His fellow colleagues were often frustrated at not receiving the gratitude they expected despite speedily resolving sources of 'hauntings' and instead being doubted or accused of deceit.

In normal circumstances, they would try explaining, but most of the time this was fruitless and would even upset them even more.

Some would even feel it beneath themselves to interact with the common folk and just leave, giving off an arrogant and cold image.

—Strangely, the latter seemed to garner good critique more often than the former.

Over time, there weren't too many willing to waste their breath on help-seekers.

However, the 'holy water first' practice of Vincent's actually saw an improvement in its effectiveness.

Letting help-seekers deploy holy water on their own would definitely help avert false alarms as well as calming down these help-seekers. Moreover, holy water really had a restrictive effect on evil spirits in the short term.

It was akin to killing two birds with one stone.

Of course, this simple method was replicated by some others, but nobody achieved the same level of success that Vincent enjoyed.

Evidently, his fellow priests only imitated one aspect but clearly didn't grasp the essence of it.

For example, they didn't know that his holy water recipe was an improved one.

Ordinary holy water only required four ingredients—Evening primrose, shadow flower, salt, and water.

The prescription that was sent out had 1g of pearl and 0.02g of gold leaf added in the mix.

Holy water by itself was made up of rather common ingredients. A combination and incantation later, this water would have the effect of driving away evil spirits. Although saying this would devalue it, holy water was really... cheap.

It took a long period of experimenting to come up with holy water suitable for the general public, and naturally, the churches took into consideration the costs that ordinary citizens could bear.

But clearly, most ordinary citizens wouldn't be that attentive.

They would wonder 'whether such cheaply-priced holy water was effective', or 'is this fellow just being perfunctory?'.

Thus, Vincent decided to make holy water a little more expensive.

Of course, Vincent didn't mess around. The quantity of pearl and gold leaf was minute, and he told those struggling financially to exclude these two ingredients, just that the effect would be slightly weaker and not a big issue.

And if that still wouldn't do, Vincent would say that he would bear the cost of the holy water and that it was his duty to help members of the parish drive off evil spirits.

To him and others of the church, this little bit of money wasn't a big deal. But doing so would often let him receive the cries of sobbing gratitude he hoped for.

It could be said that this minor change was unexpectedly effective...

And it brought him a lot of benefits.

For example, when common folk encountered anything out of the ordinary, the first thought would surely be to contact Father Vincent, and this resulted in an increased amount of jobs for him.

However, this also brought about some troubles, such as the criticism of fellow colleagues as well as the occasional requests that were beyond his ability.

Even though Vincent was the priest with the greatest reputation in the parish, he himself was only of an Abnormal-rank.

While an Abnormal-rank was already an existence that surpassed logic for most ordinary folk, there was still a huge gulf between them and other transcendent beings in the APDS classification pyramid.

Dealing with some evil spirits or low-level dream beasts wasn't an issue, but were Vincent to encounter something of a higher level, he might only be able to request for help since any lapse of judgment on his part could even be life-threatening.

Vincent would always lament, "Everything has two sides, good and bad. Just like how the bright and dark sides of the moon interchange. That is the enlightenment from the Moon above."

Amongst all transcendent beings, only the lower echelons of the churches were permitted to reveal their own abilities to ordinary folk.

One reason was the churches' need for faith, but the matter of Norzin being assaulted by the dream realm was unavoidable. Some larger matters needed to be covered up to not alarm the masses, but smaller incidents didn't have such a need.

Thus, low ranking ‘nobodies’ like Vincent had reputations that surpassed their own actual abilities.

The true higher-ups, the great entities that could save Norzin at any moment, were always obscure and little known.

It was nearly evening by the time Vincent arrived at 23rd Avenue.

The setting red sun covered by the clouds dyed the sky in faint saffron, and the ruins at the side cast large ominous shadows.

The hastily erected yellow police line appeared somewhat disheveled as it rustled continuously in the wind.

Evening... the start of the witching period.

He stopped cautiously at the junction. The street was dreadfully quiet, causing Vincent to feel a sense of unease.

Many incidents had occurred in this area recently. Even though his trip to receive baptism meant that he had missed these incidents, Vincent had still heard about the two most well-known ones.

However, those were matters concerning great beings and had nothing to do with him.

“I just have to do my job well... Hopefully it’s really an evil spirit or ghost that made the past few days of rushing back worth it. Otherwise, I will definitely add some other stuff into this help-seeker’s holy water recipe... Haa, I really shouldn’t be thinking this way.”

Vincent exhaled deeply as he pinched his nose to quash the inexplicable sense of apprehension in his heart.

Vincent wasn’t sure why, but he was feeling more irritable than usual, and some of his thoughts had lost the benevolence and tolerance a member of clergy ought to have.

Even the baptism of the newly ordained apostle wasn’t able to calm him down.

“Maybe I ought to take a few days off once this matter is resolved and pray to the Moon wholeheartedly.”

He adjusted his attire, dropped a text to the help-seeker, Mr. Colin of the audio-visual store, then knocked on the back door.

The door cracked open slightly, revealing a pair of bloodshot eyes.

Following that, the door was opened wide and the person threw himself at Vincent.

“O Holy Moon above! You’ve finally arrived, Father Vincent! Please save me!”

If this lump of a human hadn’t said these words, Vincent would have nearly used some mystical arts on him.

Pushing aside this greasy lump, he did his best to maintain a warm tone. “Hush, dear child. You don’t wish to alarm the evil spirit next door, do you?”

Colin immediately nodded his head and quietened down, hugging Father Vincent as tears and mucus came into contact with the black priest robe.

Vincent seemed somewhat tired, but he had the solemn eyes of a priest capable of making others believe in him.

“So, I roughly understand the situation already. Now, you are telling me that just today, he hurt three officers from the Central District’s Police Unit and even controlled the will of another one?

“And the holy water isn’t effective and even made his actions worse?

“If what you said is true, I would need to have more adequate preparation and start the exorcism tomorrow night. I’ll have to stay here temporarily for today.”

Colin nodded at once. “No problem! Let me know if you need anything. I’ll cooperate in any way I can!”

Not doing anything would be the best form of cooperation you can provide...

Vincent sighed and closed the door, isolating himself from Colin's incessant jabbering—The feeling of staying alone in this room wasn't too bad.

All these ignorant fellows are really annoying!

He wiped away the sweat on his forehead and took out a cigarette from his chest pocket.

He lit it, took a long drag, and exhaled a mouthful of misty smoke.

Chapter 104 Moon Within The Water

Chapter 104: Moon Within The Water

The next day.

Having maintained the prayer posture for an entire night, Vincent opened his eyes. His palms that were clasped together came apart, revealing the holy dome emblem that still shimmered with a faint, dwindling moonlight.

He stood up and removed the aetheric boundary set up around him, making the thin layer of aether shrouding his body dissipate in an instant, like a gentle gust of wind.

This simple meditation boundary was composed of three parts.

First was the array beneath his feet that was drawn with holy water. At present, it was starting to evaporate following the conclusion of the meditation session.

The wet spots on the floorboards vanished gradually, leaving behind the faint fragrance of shadow flowers.

The second component was the power source for maintaining the boundary. On more formal occasions, sorcery tools possessing the moon's spirituality such as moonstones would be used.

But now that Vincent had arrived here in a hurry, he could only use the aether he could grasp on his own.

The third component was the holy dome emblem in his hands. This was used to form the bridge between his spirit and the moon.

The design on the silver emblem was a simple waning crescent moon surrounded by wave-like patterns.

These wavy patterns seem simple, but a closer inspection would

reveal that these lines were actually a complex incantation.

Every clergyman of the Church of the Dome had their own holy emblem.

It was both an emblem of their status as well as an optimal medium for sorcery and meditation.

Each clergy member's holy emblem was formed by pouring their spiritual power into the link between their consciousness and the moon during their first baptism upon entering the church. Thus, the holy emblem was a perfectly compatible sorcery tool for their respective owners.

“My meditation efficiency has really decreased, and now it takes three times longer to enter a meditative state... Besides the distracting thoughts during meditation, there's some strange chattering and a scene that flashes by?”

Vincent frowned and once more felt that inexplicable irascibility, like a raging fury impatient to burst forth from the constraints of his heart.

“What's wrong with me?”

He kept away his holy emblem reluctantly, taking out a packet of cigarettes from his chest pocket, and lit one up.

“Huu...”

Only when the smoke entered his lungs was he able to calm himself down and rid his mind of all other distracting thoughts.

Even the jittery aether became docile and flowed in accordance to the smoke he exhaled.

This soothing sensation brought him back to the time Vincent had his first baptism.

At that time, the old priest presiding the ceremony had pressed his coarse, warm palms onto Vincent's head and gently pushed him into the water.

“We are servants of the Moon. We worship, serve, love, and fear the Moon.

“We are one with the Moon. Birth under the bright, death under the dark. Each time, the Moon completes a cycle between light and darkness, the cycle of life and death recurs, and the dead receive new life.

“We receive the blessings and protection of the Moon. At the same time, we can never gaze beyond the dome, till death do we rise into the sky.”

The old priest’s calm and steady voice reverberated as glimmers of light within the ripples appeared in his young self’s field of vision.

When he was submerged, Vincent had seen the reflected moon in the water.

This memory from his youth was like dipping his fingers into a baptismal pool.

Soft, and warm.

From that day on, Vincent no longer saw the true moonlight again.

When Vincent returned to his senses, he had already finished an entire cigarette. All that remained between his fingers was a smoldering butt.

His eyes widened with shock as a cold shudder crept through his body.

*How... is this possible?! D-d-did I just see the moon from my memory?!
How can that be!*

After the baptism was complete, every impression of the true moon should have been removed from his memory!

“No, no, no... That was a reflection in the water, not the actual moon!”

Vincent muttered to himself between ragged breaths. Large beads of

sweat appeared on his forehead and dripped down as panic, fear, and apprehension gripped his mind.

He knew that he was lying to himself. Everything related to the true moon should have already vanished from within his soul.

Despite how much they loved and longed for the moon, they absolutely couldn't look straight at the moon.

This was just how the clergymen of the Church of the Dome were.

"But... but what's going on now? How could I see the moon within the water? Is my conviction not pious enough? Or is this the moon's punishment?"

Vincent was overcome with a complex mix of emotions...

He stared at the holy emblem in his hands and muttered as if intoxicated, "So that is the true moon."

The priest's body was completely drenched in sweat-out of fear. His hand reached shakily for another cigarette.

As a spiral of smoke started to rise, Vincent suddenly threw the cigarette along with its box to the ground and cursed through gritted teeth, "Damn it!"

Bang bang bang!

"Father!" "Father!" "Father Vincent! Are you alright!"

The banging on the door and the shouts of the audio-visual store boss made Vincent stop in his tracks.

"I've already prepared the things you asked for. What do we do next?" Colin continued to make a ruckus from outside.

Vincent took a deep breath and bent down to pick up the cigarette while trying his best to keep his composure. "I'm fine, I'll be out in a moment."

He opened the door. Colin was still harping on how terrifying the

evil spirit next door was, but Vincent didn't feel irritated this time.

He helped Colin set up, checking the boundaries, exorcism arrays, and equipment, and ensuring everything was in order.

In the meantime, he had already tried to probe the bookstore next door via the aether, but he hadn't been able to discover anything significant.

"Are you saying that you have been shouting outside the door for close to a minute?" Vincent asked with a raised eyebrow.

"I swear! I'm certain I'm not making things up!" Colin swore right away. "I was calling you from outside for quite some time and decided to knock on the door when there was no reply."

Huu...

Vincent exhaled sharply as he squeezed the bridge of his nose. Things were even more serious than he had imagined.

He had completely been unaware that he had been hallucinating just now.

Vincent shook his head. However, the top priority now was to help Colin resolve his problem.

As for his own problem, Vincent would look into it after dealing with the matter at hand.

At nightfall, Vincent put on a black blindfold, equipped his exorcism tools, and headed out.

Under the night sky and moonlight, he pushed open the door of the next-door bookstore.

Jingle.

"Welcome! Would you..." Lin Jie raised his head towards the fated customer that had entered today.

But before he finished his sentence, Lin Jie was momentarily

stunned as he noticed the blindfolded man in clergy robes.

A blind man? No, a blind priest?

One that ought to guide others was actually a person that ought to be guided by others. Lin Jie had to admit that it was a tad ironic.

“Is there anything I can help you with? Feel free to buy, borrow, or read books here, and you can even have a rest if you want to.”

Lin Jie’s tone was gentler than usual as he smiled warmly.

Mu’en was about to head forward and assist the priest when Lin Jie put up an arm to stop her.

He gestured to Mu’en to keep quiet before asking, “Are you a priest from the Church of the Dome?”

Chapter 105 Look, Father

Chapter 105: Look, Father

Vincent stopped in his tracks.

His original plan had been to sound out the bookstore owner.

According to what Colin had said, the bookstore still operated as per normal. If the owner was indeed under the influence of an evil spirit or transcendent being, he would still appear normal under most circumstances.

Vincent had encountered situations like this in the past.

Some souls remaining in the human realm via death by suicide would repeat their actions in life without knowing that they were already dead.

There were also some special circumstances where the evil spirit wasn't powerful enough to influence a host and could only weave traps like a spider and slowly kill off the host.

Moreover, Colin had said that there hadn't been any strange occurrences prior to this. It was only in the previous month when he asked the bookstore owner to turn on the circuit breaker did these strange things begin.

Thus, Vincent had an assumption that a low-level dream beast had come out through one of the dream realm fractures that appeared during the period when that Supreme-rank dream beast was gestating.

It had perhaps used the aetheric fluctuations of that Supreme-rank beast to hide itself and escape the attention of Secret Rite Tower and the Truth Union.

At present, Vincent didn't sense any hint of a ghost, so he suspected that this was probably the work of a dream beast or some other

extraordinary being.

Vincent had made sufficient preparations before coming, but he never expected such a mishap right off the bat.

The other party was even more... clear-headed than he imagined.

Besides not revealing any indications of possessing this body, it had even determined that Vincent was a priest from the Church of the Dome.

However, this bookstore did give off a very unusual vibe and Vincent did indeed sense some traces of aether upon entering.

This meant that the bookstore had seen the activity of transcendent beings or creatures before.

For instance, that stone gargoyle on the counter gave off an extremely chilling and resentful aura. For a moment, Vincent felt as if he had found the chief culprit.

Colin's calls for help weren't unfounded. However... he had been mistaken. The problem didn't lie with the bookstore owner but the bookstore itself or the objects within.

However, the current situation seemed somewhat dangerous.

When he came over fully armed to exorcise a spirit, the other party had suddenly asked whether he was a priest from the Church of the Moon. Vincent wondered if this was a veiled warning.

Vincent's mind went to work quickly as he maintained his vigilance while trying to keep his composure.

He cleared his throat and walked over to take a seat. "Yes, I'm currently on a work assignment in this parish."

As he said this, Vincent carefully 'observed' the bookstore owner's expression.

—Although clergymen of the church needed to blindfold themselves every night so that they wouldn't see the moon, they were blessed

with ‘Eyes of the Moon,’ a special visual sense that allowed them to see in the dark, fog, and even view the bodily conditions of others.

However, when observing the bookstore owner, all Vincent saw was an entirely ordinary person.

Since the problem didn’t lie with the person, there were certainly some other circumstances that Colin was oblivious to... This bookstore owner could perhaps be a victim too.

He could try convincing the other party to leave first, then perform an exorcism on this gargoyle.

“Work?”

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow. The priest before him seemed responsible and diligent, yet Lin Jie could clearly sense some disguised meaning behind his words. As if there was something he wanted to say, yet hesitating to be straightforward about.

Since he said it was work and seemed to have come over with an objective, Lin Jie suspected that it was indeed something to do with his work.

So, what was the job of a priest?

Managing the followers of a parish, doing missionary work, officiating weddings, prayers, confessionals, sacraments as well as... exorcisms.

Lin Jie felt that the sudden visit by a priest wasn’t a special attempt to convert him, and the other reasons were even more unlikely.

Thus, he made a mental association and wondered whether this had anything to do with him being mistaken to be an ‘evil spirit’ by the boss next door as mentioned by those police officers that had come to do some questioning.

Lin Jie suddenly saw the light and smiled widely. “It’s Colin, right? He regards me as an ‘evil spirit’ and has requested for someone to come and exorcise me.”

Haa... His hesitation makes sense now. Colin actually mistook me to be an evil spirit and specially called for a priest!

Vincent's expression changed slightly, but he managed to catch himself from showing any signs of weakness, except for the silver holy emblem in his hand nearly slipping out.

He actually knows?!

Lin Jie noticed the 'subtle' change in the priest's expression and felt that the both of them could sympathize with each other. This was indeed an embarrassing situation.

Colin had really gone overboard with this!

Calling a priest from afar only for him to end up in such an awkward situation.

Given the tone of those police officers, Lin Jie guessed that Colin's firm insistence on him being an 'evil spirit' had caused quite some distress for this priest and thus, he had come to seek out the other person involved to come up with a countermeasure.

"Actually, this is simply a massive misunderstanding. Although I don't know why Colin thinks this way, I'm obviously just an ordinary owner of a bookstore, made of flesh and blood like anybody else," Lin Jie lamented.

Then, as if he just thought of something, Lin Jie mentioned, "Oh right, a few police officers came over recently after hearing Colin's ridiculous talk. I explained it to them and they can definitely bear witness."

Vincent's expression turned uglier. Those three policemen had clearly been carried out!

"Look, Father."

To prove his innocence, Lin Jie brought over the stone gargoyle at the side.

With a beaming smile, he said, "I didn't manage to tell those three

officers about this stone gargoyle that was given to me by a customer as a souvenir. Gargoyles are to ward off evil spirits and ghosts. How could I place a stone gargoyle on the counter if I was an evil spirit?”

Vincent’s eyes widened as he met the gaze of the stone gargoyle placed in front of him.

The bookstore owner took his hand and placed it on the stone sculpture. “Father, have a feel. The craftsmanship of this gargoyle is seriously exquisite.”

He could practically see the hundreds of deceased souls wailing mournfully and trying to claw their way out from within the sinister blood-red eyes of the stone gargoyle.

Lin Jie placed the gargoyle back, then pushed the flowerpot over. “And there’s this rose that I grew personally. Look at how beautiful it is. I’m definitely a person who loves life.”

Vincent couldn’t pull his hand away in time and came into contact with the rose.

All the hairs on his body practically stood on end!

Those petals felt like real flesh and the blossom was filled with rings of sharp teeth. And there was still that round squirming object full of blood vessels... like an eyeball!

“Enough!” Vincent couldn’t help shouting as he jerked his hand back.

Clink!

The sound of metal hitting the table made Vincent realize that he had dropped his holy emblem!

“Enough? Oh... I mean that this is more than enough evidence for me to explain the situation to Colin...” Vincent caught himself. Lin Jie picked up the holy emblem and handed it over with a smile. “Father, you dropped this.”

Chapter 106 Addiction

Chapter 106: Addiction

Gulp.

Vincent could clearly hear himself swallowing. At this moment, all was deathly silent.

He watched the bookstore owner handing over the silver holy emblem with a beaming face and didn't dare put his own hands up to receive it.

Vincent was wrong! He had been gravely mistaken!

The problem was the bookstore owner and not the bookstore or other supernatural creatures!

Vincent had come across common creation techniques and methods used by black magicians when reading up in the church's archives.

More than a hundred souls were trapped within that stone gargoyle, acting as its core impetus and letting it possess immense power.

He could practically sense his certain death if the stone gargoyle was to 'come alive'!

Through 'Eyes of the Moon,' Vincent saw that every single of those resentful souls were transcendent beings that had died under excruciatingly painful and bitter circumstances. Their souls were fused together into a huge mass of energy and became the will of this stone sculpture.

This was a skill only a black magician of a similar rank could possess.

On top of that, the black magician who created this stone gargoyle must have definitely been extremely cruel to have killed so many people cold-bloodedly.

But regardless of who the creator was, possessing it meant that the bookstore owner was definitely a transcendent being of at least Destructive-rank.

That spine-chilling rose made Vincent feel as if he was staring at a dark abyss. Its avaricious mouth lined with teeth seemed as if it was always wanting to devour something... and anything devoured would never return.

Vincent's fear of this rose was even greater than that of the stone gargoyle.

"What's the matter, Father?"

Lin Jie watched the blindfolded priest in astonishment and wondered why the other party wasn't taking the pot. But when he thought about how this was a blind person, Lin Jie realized that passing it at a height wasn't the right thing to do. Thus, he placed the pot on the table, intentionally making a light tapping sound before saying, "I'll place it here then, please help yourself."

Then, Lin Jie casually added, "You seem a little pale. Are you alright, Father?"

"... I'm fine."

Vincent forced a weak smile as he wiped away beads of sweat on his forehead. With slight trembling, he answered, "Perhaps it's just the lack of sleep. The journey here was rather rushed and I didn't get too many good nights of sleep along the way."

His gaze fell on the holy emblem on the counter-top as he tried to calm down his pounding heart.

The only usable sorcery tool was now in the hands of the bookstore owner, and that line, "please help yourself," was absolutely a provocation and a threat.

Unfortunately, Vincent was a mere priest without much combat skills. Without the aid of the holy emblem to support him, Vincent didn't even dare try to take it back as a feeling of hopelessness crept over him.

All he could do was abandon himself to despair and wonder what exactly this absolute powerhouse was up to.

“Heh, this is a huge misunderstanding. Colin has really gone overboard this time—Who knows how he came up with such a misunderstanding but he has clearly inconvenienced others now.”

Lin Jie continued in exasperation, “But at least it’s all good now. Please make sure to tell him the entire truth that I’m no evil spirit. Let’s hope this baseless misunderstanding can be cleared up as quickly as possible.”

You might not be an evil spirit, but you are definitely a more terrifying entity! howled Vincent deep down.

His throat was dry and his entire body trembled continuously. Vincent wasn’t a cowardly person, but this persisting state of anxiety, fear, and constant throbbing came flooding all at once.

He couldn’t describe this sensation, but he was still able to distinguish it.

This sensation wasn’t psychological but physiological instead.

He was drenched in a cold sweat and was slightly gasping for breath. His heart pounded rapidly and he felt a numbing fear spread throughout his body.

His vision started to turn white.

With his mental state seemingly magnified, Vincent felt that it was even more unbearable and his muscles seemed to be on the verge of convulsing.

Breath, breath... My chest feels awful... I need a... smoke...

Vincent’s fingers twitched subconsciously and he coughed twice, then reached into the cigarette case in his chest pocket.

He then pulled out one cigarette and attempted to light it as if it was his last hope of salvation.

A wonderful and impulsive thirst made him forget for a brief moment about the bookstore owner watching him. With his gaze firmly fixed on the tip of the cigarette, Vincent said, "I...I'll explain it well to Colin. I believe he will see you differently from now on."

He couldn't help but heave a sigh of relief as his frazzled mind reset itself.

It does seem like the bookstore owner wants to keep his identity a secret from his neighbor. I won't be silenced if I help him hide it... right?

But will Secret Rite Tower or the Truth Union not care about an entity like this?

Do I have to report this to the church?

Chirk!

Chirk!

While in thought and saying this, Vincent had subconsciously struck the match twice but it hadn't lit up.

At this moment, Lin Jie reminded him, "Father, smoking is prohibited in the bookstore."

Vincent jolted because of the strict tone which reminded him of being reprimanded back in theology classes.

"I'm sorry!" He kept away the cigarette quickly and glanced up to meet the darkened face of the bookstore owner.

At a loss, Vincent suddenly felt panic-stricken.

His limbs went soft and his skin became numb.

"I'm very sorry! I didn't know, I was..."

"You couldn't control yourself. Am I right?"

The smile on Lin Jie's face disappeared entirely as he folded his arms. "Have you been feeling uneasy recently, sweating in your

sleep, having changes in your mood, uncontrollable shivering, difficulty breathing, and an overwhelming desire to...”

Lin Jie pointed at the tightly gripped cigarette in Vincent’s hand.
“...smoke?”

His expression had turned solemn when he noticed Vincent’s trembling and panting, and his gaze was now firmly fixed on the priest sitting opposite him.

From the moment Vincent had entered the bookstore, Lin Jie had realized that this priest didn’t seem to be in a good shape mentally. However, Lin Jie had assumed this was due to work stress and a lack of sleep.

But as their conversation went on, he had caught on to the various mannerisms of this priest. And when Vincent took out a cigarette, Lin Jie was certain of his suspicions.

The priest sitting before him had an addiction!

However, the priest himself didn’t seem to realize it and he seemed at a loss. This meant that he could have been set up by someone else!

Vincent stared at the cigarette in his hand with a dumbfounded look on his face.

Lin Jie’s gaze remained firmly in place as he asked solemnly,
“Father, where did this cigarette come from?”

Chapter 107 Please Give Me Guidance

Chapter 107: Please Give Me Guidance

“An addiction? There’s a problem... with these cigarettes?”

Vincent quickly returned to his senses. He looked at Lin Jie’s solemn expression and shook his head vigorously. “Impossible!”

Lin Jie wasn’t surprised by the priest’s reaction. For him to ignorantly accept such cigarettes and be unaware of his own withdrawal symptoms meant that the source of these cigarettes was from a trusted source.

It was this exact reason that made it all the more chilling. Whether it was the shop he got it from, or whoever had given it.

Such an exploit was extremely black-hearted.

“Hell is other people. (quote by Jean-Paul Sarte) You can never know what other people think, and no one can be completely trusted.”

Lin Jie’s arms remained folded as he spoke slowly, “There’s nothing that’s really impossible. Father, how about answering a few questions first?”

Like I even have a choice?! Vincent thought to himself.

But of course, there was no way he could say it aloud.

Indeed, Lin Jie didn’t wait for a yes or no and started on his questioning, “Where did this cigarette come from?”

Vincent eyed the cigarette in his hand, hesitated for a while, then emptied out the hard case.

A vague printed image of a silver tree crown could be vaguely seen

on the center of the surplus sticks of cigarettes.

Although transactions of supernatural objects were supposed to be confidential, there was probably no need for secrecy seeing that he was dealing with a transcendent being of at least Destructive-rank.

“Ash Chamber of Commerce.”

Vincent closed the cigarette case once again and took a deep breath.

“I got this from the Ash Chamber of Commerce. It’s called ‘Holy Moon Essence’ and only started selling recently... It’s still experimental in nature and only offered to selected clergy members of the church.

“The Seventh Apostle has already approved of its effects and believes that it is helpful in meditation and fostering a strong connection with the Moon.”

Because of this, when his meditation efficiency fell, Vincent assumed it was an issue in himself and had never once suspected that these cigarettes were the problem.

For clergy members, ‘obedience’ was also a compulsory lesson.

Apostles had jurisdiction over priests and ranked third in the clergy hierarchy, representing a part of the moon’s will and possessed absolute authority.

But now, after the bookstore owner had spoken up about it, a whiff of doubt had started to creep over Vincent.

Could there really be a problem...

Vincent shook his head again. “But that’s impossible!

“The credibility of the Ash Chamber of Commerce has never been in question. Moreover, the Apostle himself and all other priests I know say that the Holy Moon Essence works very well...”

It seemed that he was the only one that had adverse symptoms.

Ash Chamber of Commerce? Lin Jie was slightly surprised. He never expected to hear such a familiar name come out from the priest's mouth.

However, it wasn't that difficult to understand either... The Ash Chamber of Commerce had a great deal of resources. Being able to provide false identities within Norzin easily was one such example.

They might not be on the same level as Rolle Resource Development, but they were definitely a big player.

To put it in a modern-day analogy, Rolle Resource Development was a huge enterprise producing goods in all kinds of fields while the Ash Chamber of Commerce was Taobao.

On such a sales platform, it wasn't surprising to find items specially provided for clergymen.

Lin Jie could understand why the priest opposite him had unconditional trust in the quality of these cigarettes if it was from the Ash Chamber of Commerce.

Even if he hadn't encountered Cherry, Lin Jie would still know that the Ash Chamber of Commerce was a very reputable and reliable sales platform.

On top of this, the priest had mentioned this was approved of by an apostle and there were also others that used it.

But the symptoms this priest was having were also very real.

It seemed that this was even more complicated than Lin Jie imagined.

"I've said before, nothing is impossible. I'll ask about the Ash Chamber of Commerce, but for now, it's you that's most important. Father, who are you willing to trust?"

Trust the church, or... Trust him? Vincent fell silent the instant he realized the implication of that question.

The bookstore fell into deathly silence once more. Vincent wished

to pray to the moon for calm, but there was no reaction from the holy emblem in his hand.

He subconsciously took out another cigarette and wanted to light it, but he caught himself midway.

Vincent forced a bitter smile as he stared at the cigarette in his hand. He had to admit that there was clearly something not right.

When gazing at that cigarette, Vincent felt that extremely unpleasant sensation washed over him once more. Without any thoughts distracting him, his sense of touch clearly felt as if a swarm of ants was climbing all over his body and he even felt a vague itch within his innards.

This was clearly a tremendous sense of fear!

However, he had no way of doubting the church. All the education and teachings he had received forbade him to question the church.

“I don’t know... I really don’t. Please give me guidance!” Vincent bent forward, gripping the cigarette case tightly.

Lin Jie sighed. It was just like seeing the Old Wil from two years ago.

At that time, Wilde was also going through a painful period. Back then, he was at a loss from his own convictions crumbling and had been on a path to self-destruction.

Fortunately, he had walked into this bookstore and encountered such a warm, good-samaritan in Lin Jie and as of now, had gotten his life back on track.

But compared to Old Wil, the priest before Lin Jie might be going through even greater suffering.

It was sort of cruel for a clergy member to question his church.

However... The pangs of independent thinking were inevitable.

If the Church of the Dome did really have internal problems and

were continuously tormenting this good priest who had traveled a great deal just to help a member of his parish with an 'exorcism', then that was truly cruel indeed.

"Relax. Other things can be put aside first, and the investigation can be done later on. What's most important right now is your current physical condition," comforted Lin Jie.

"You probably don't smoke much," Lin Jie continued his analysis.

"According to what you said, your colleagues don't have any negative effects. On the contrary, they smoke more frequently and are very normal when under the effect of 'Holy Moon Essence.'

"How do you feel right now?"

Vincent looked up, calming himself down with a deep breath before finally speaking, "I saw the Moon in my imagination. But this is something impossible."

A blind person seeing was impossible indeed. This was either a dream or an illusion.

But having reached such a point, it did seem a little severe.

"Halting the consumption of 'Holy Moon Essence' might cause you to have these strange effects and make you jittery.

"Try doing something else to divert your attention away."

Lin Jie stood up and picked up a braille copy of *Three Days to See* .

"I feel that this book is very suitable for you. Perhaps you will be able to 'see' something different inside."

Vincent stared blankly at the book within his field of vision that was illuminating brightly like a fiery white blaze.

Something very different... Indeed.

Chapter 108 Sun Scripture

Chapter 108: Sun Scripture

Through Vincent's 'Eyes of the Moon', the book emitted a blazing radiance the moment it left the shelf.

It was dazzling like the sun, practically lighting up the entire bookstore.

The bookstore owner seemed like he was holding a ball of flame... or a small sun. That intense brilliance seemed to allow one to experience the power contained within. Coupled with the slight smile on his face, the immense sense of 'divinity' emanating from within thoroughly shocked Vincent.

This priest of the Church of the Dome couldn't help standing up.

He was all too familiar with this type of sensation...

Every time during meditation and prayer, when the soul and holy emblem resonated, thoughts would sink into the aetheric domain of the moon.

And when blessed with the moon's favor and protection, one could use magic to heal the sick or banish evil.

Every clergy member of the Church of the Dome possessed such power within them, allowing themselves to become supernatural beings that were different from ordinary folk.

The moon above the dome bestowed the devout and pious ones with its divinity.

But clearly, the 'divinity' and power emanating from within this book was even more intense, invasive, and brimming with vitality.

It was as if a great amount of the moon's spiritual power was concentrated and ignited...

Vincent could clearly sense that the two had the same roots.

And even more terrifying for Vincent was that he vaguely sensed that these two powers weren't from one source, but rather, one arising from the other.

As for which came from the other, Vincent tried to forcefully ignore the notion.

However, 'Eyes of the Moon' didn't miss any strange phenomena in its field of vision.

Another faint light source appeared in the midst of this brilliant radiance. Vincent unconsciously looked at it and his eyes widened in shock as he nearly tore off his own blindfold.

The other light source, emitting a faint light and echoing the 'divinity' of that book, was his own holy emblem!

Yes, the silvery emblem of the waning moon belonging to the Church of the Dome was currently shining with its own gentle light.

Vincent watched as his holy emblem got brighter and brighter. Its illumination got to the point where it was even brighter than when he meditated or performed magic!

As untimely as it was, Vincent could only stare at the holy emblem and even doubted who its actual owner was.

Thinking of how the holy emblem was always with him even during sleep made Vincent feel an ineffable sense of being betrayed.

And at the same time, because the holy emblem merged with a part of his spirit, Vincent felt a warm energy full of vitality surging into his body. He wasn't able to resist this powerful energy and it instantly calmed all the discomfort and nervousness within his body.

Vincent relaxed, falling into a daze as if he was soaking in a hot tub after a long and busy day.

It was like a sense of home. There was no estrangement from the

moon's divinity and it was even flowing like a river...

While his body was completely at ease, a terrible thought crept into Vincent's mind. *Is this...The true god?!*

At the thought of it, the terror from everything he had known before thrown out the window caused a chill to run up Vincent's spine and made him shudder.

Vincent's body went stiff and his mind buzzed with the words Lin Jie had just said— "*Who are you willing to trust?*"

The implied meaning behind this sentence wasn't as shallow as Vincent had previously interpreted!

The bookstore owner wasn't asking about the Holy Moon Essence, the church, or getting Vincent to make a choice.

On the contrary, he had been asking what Vincent would choose to believe in when he saw this 'difference' and when his own understanding was subverted.

Even more frightening was the fact that Vincent had gulped and asked the moon above to forgive his blasphemy.

He must have been deluded, otherwise how would he have had the absurd thought that the power within that book was the source of the moon's divinity?

"During the long night of my life, books have built themselves into a great shining lighthouse. Books have revealed to me the deepest channels of human life and the human spirit."

Lin Jie handed the book over with a smile as he recited an excerpt from *Three Days to See* .

Then he said, "The blind have to keep their hearts and minds clear. Reading is a great way of doing so. Books are the stairs of humanity's progress as well as avenues of education that will help calm you down.

"This autobiography about Helen Keller, a great woman without a

doubt, was a record about the story of her life.

“How a naturally blind and deaf person gradually found hope in life, viewed everything with a positive and optimistic attitude, and lived a life that was brighter than most others.”

Lin Jie felt that this was the best book that could be given to a blind person.

Vincent stared at the book, still shaken by the phrase “During the long night.”

The long night, could it refer to the ancient Second Era? The period without light nor fire?!

Gasp.

Vincent inhaled sharply. He had initially guessed that the bookstore owner was a transcendent being of Destructive-rank. But piecing together these words along with the divinity from the book...

Could he be a Supreme-rank entity that has lived for thousands of years?!

Vincent’s back was already drenched with cold sweat and he now felt a chill.

When he mentioned the blind, was he mocking the people of the Church of the Dome for being unable to see the true divinity and worshipping an empty shell?

Every single sentence said by the bookstore owner seemed to have a meaning. Vincent felt contempt at himself for needing to take a while to comprehend each time.

It was as if he was an ignorant child standing at the foot of a giant, and a sense of inferiority arose within him.

Lin Jie continued, “Actually, all you need is to believe in yourself—Read this book and judge for yourself. You only need to find your true self and step out of the darkness, using the heart’s eyes to see the truth and embrace the light.”

He gestured for Vincent to take the book.

Vincent stared at the book before slowly reaching out and taking the book with both hands.

That white blaze-like radiance converged together and dwindled, eventually revealing the shape of the book as well as its title.

The text was like some ancient carved cuneiform characters, made up of dots and other symbols that Vincent would never have understood, but when he reached out and touched the words, the meaning came naturally to him.

Sun Scripture . That was the title of this book.

Moonlight originates from the sun, and thus, the source of the moon's divinity was the Sun Scripture. This thought popped up in Vincent's mind subconsciously.

However, no one ever believed in the sun. After the First Era, light, fire, and the sun had disappeared within the dream realm and Azir entered the Second Era, the time of no light and fire.

If the Sun was the true god, then what was the Moon now?

Chapter 109 Accepting The Truth

Chapter 109: Accepting The Truth

Vincent grew up in the Church of the Dome's St. Rolland Convent on Norzin 4th Avenue.

This was the Church of the Dome's second largest Convent in Norzin and had its own comprehensive education system.

The convent took in gifted orphans to train the most outstanding priests and nuns for the Church of the Dome. After these kids grew up, they would be sent to parishes that required manpower.

At the same time, real orphanages were set up for children who had no talent to begin with, or those eliminated from the education process, to receive normal education after the removal of memories about the supernatural.

As a very orthodox priest, Vincent was a man of great learning, not only well-versed in theology, but many other subjects as well..

One very important subject was the history of Azir.

Compared to the obscure history known to most ordinary folk, Vincent had systematically studied the ancient past that was hidden by supernatural folk.

The period till when the Second Era ended, and the wall and fog constructed was a time of pure myth.

The Church of the Dome came about in the Third Era. Believers of the moon, who gained power through their connection with it. They reckoned the moon was the only original existence in this world that had survived till now and was keeping the gods within the dream realm in check.

Meanwhile, the sun was extinguished within the dream realm at the start of the Second Era, immediately causing the start of this dark age as well as the demise of giants.

Before today, Vicent had always believed that the sun and moon were two different holy entities.

Although there might have been some connection between the two, it wasn't much. After all, the sun had been extinguished but moonlight remained eternal, continuing to illuminate the world and giving strength to its believers.

Until now...

With his own eyes, he had seen his holy emblem glowing in resonance with the book titled Sun Scripture as if the two were parts of a whole.

The 'divinity' gushing out from this book brought about an irresistible warmth and power which washed away all the discomfort within his body.

Vincent was also able to vaguely sense it dominating his own powers.

His mind was filled by the thought that there could be a problem with this supernatural object recommended by the Seventh Apostle as 'a meditation aid and way to strengthen one's connection with the moon.'

Vincent felt utterly confused and didn't dare open the book in his hand. However, the doubt within him was continuously increasing.

What went wrong? What should he do now?

Unconsciously, he looked up to the only person who could guide him now.

Under the dim light, the bookstore owner revealed a slight, mysterious smile. "Don't worry, there's no need to be confused. Father, you will discover your own answer from this book and find the light that only belongs to you."

“Also, all your questions will be answered eventually. As long as you are willing and determined to seek them, I will also lend you my help.”

With regards to this matter, the victim was the priest in front of him. The decision whether or not to investigate the truth was still his.

The Church of the Dome was powerful and had the great conviction of this priest.

Lin Jie wouldn't find it strange even if this priest chose to give up for his own interests or safety, even if his own conviction crumbled completely.

However, this was a psychological baseline that Lin Jie had set. From his current observations, the priest in front of him didn't seem like such a person. On the contrary, he appeared to be struggling with his emotions and seemed at a loss. However, the book was clenched tightly in his hand, which meant he had no intention of putting it down.

This meant that deep down, he had already made his decision and only needed someone to guide him.

A priest who was often a guide for others also needed someone to show him a way when his own faith falters.

Lin Jie was exactly the guide he hoped for; mysterious, powerful, and purposeful.

Vincent replayed his impression of the bookstore owner within his mind and tried to guess his motive.

If the bookstore owner was really an immortal that had survived since the Second Era, he would surely have experienced that mythical age; or, be a part of those legends.

That would mean that his existence outlived even the Church of the Dome, the sun extinguishing, the demise of the giants... and even the rise of humankind. It was likely that the bookstore owner had witnessed all of these.

He must have known all too well the truth about the moon and the sun, and this book, Sun Scripture, was the proof.

The bookstore owner had given this book and asked Vincent to find the light.

Could... Could he be using this opportunity to 'set the record straight' regarding this history that had been warped and distorted?

Vincent was taken aback by this notion, but he found it increasingly plausible the more he thought about it.

Otherwise, how was it possible that such a great being would even bother with an ordinary priest like Vincent to the point of deliberately leading him here?

Indeed, the next door shopkeeper's request was definitely an outcome that the bookstore owner had planned for.

Employing such a natural and secretive method to lure Vincent here for a chat before handing this crucial book seemed as if he was merely toying with the threads of fate.

Vincent gasped silently. These great beings are truly terrifying indeed.

Vincent felt that declining in this situation would mean he ending up as one of the trapped souls within the stone gargoyle or as fertilizer for that rose.

He now understood that the conversation that transpired previously was a warning in advance.

In a sense, there was no other option.

Besides, the intense need for answers and getting to the bottom of it all was too strong right now.

Was his faith actually the ashes of the sun, or of a false god seizing power?

And what was the reason for the church permitting the circulation

of this hallucinogenic substance?

Accepting the book Sun Scripture was like accepting a part of the truth.

The priest exhaled slowly. Gripping the sacred scripture tightly, he spoke with determination, “I understand. It’s my honor to receive your help. My only desire is to know the truth.”

The determination displayed by this priest hadn’t deviated from Lin Jie’s judgment.

“Coming to this understanding is proof that your heart has chosen a path. Well done,” said Lin Jie with a nod.

“However, you still have even more to do. You have to rely on yourself if you wish to know the truth,” Lin Jie continued.

After all, Lin Jie didn’t have a deep understanding of the Church of the Dome and it would be better to let the other party fight the battle on his own turf.

But now this matter seemed even more complicated since it involved the Ash Chamber of Commerce.

However, there wasn’t just one solution and it beats having the priest investigate it all by himself.

After all, from Lin Jie’s understanding of Cherry, she didn’t seem like that sort of person. Therefore it could mean someone within might be attempting to ruin Ash Chamber of Commerce’s reputation.

Lin Jie believed that Cherry would be interested in this.

Resting his chin on his palms, Lin Jie said, “I’ll ask Cherry about what’s wrong with this batch of Holy Moon Essence.”

Chapter 110 That Child

Chapter 110: That Child

Cherry? Cherry Chapman!

As this topic was already related to the Ash Chamber of Commerce, It didn't take much for Vincent to associate the name with one of the Ash Chamber of Commerce's three heads.

The 'Chapman Witch', Cherry Chapman, whose rise to power was fabled.

In actuality, lower level transcendent beings rarely knew much about beings of other factions and would have much less opportunities to know about those with greater reputations.

As a priest that frequently took on exorcism commissions and meditated daily, gossip wasn't a form of entertainment for Vincent, and his knowledge of those great beings was even lesser.

However, the Ash Chamber of Commerce was controlled by the Druid priests. While Druids were a small number, had a high threshold for induction, and rarely did any missionary activities, they were still considered a sect.

Moreover, they were a sect that collaborated with the church, so the Church of the Dome would still pay some special attention to the Ash Chamber of Commerce.

Especially... the half-breed's ascension to power that was both fabled and controversial, which meant that even Vincent knew the name of this new leader.

Lin Jie wanted to explain a little more about Cherry when he noticed Vincent's slight change of expression.

"Oh?" Lin Jie raised an eyebrow. "You know that child too, Father?"

"I think I do... The one from the Chapman Family?" Vincent asked cautiously and couldn't help inching backwards when he got an affirmative.

The bookstore owner had addressed Cherry Chapman as 'that child'.

Even though it was rumored that she had the appearance of a 12-year-old kid, the Chapman Witch's real age was over a hundred.

While such an age wasn't much of a deal amongst night elves, for humankind, this was a figure that surpassed the longest lifespans of ordinary humans.

This was a hundred years worth of true experience. Otherwise, Cherry wouldn't have been able to hold down a position in such a huge organization like the Ash Chamber of Commerce, even if she did have the rumored ability to manipulate the hearts of others.

It seemed like Vincent's previous guess was right... *The bookstore owner is definitely an immortal!*

Furthermore, the way he casually mentioned he would 'go ask her' showed that he was rather close to the Chapman Witch.

This meant that he could contact Cherry Chapman at any time and easily get her to investigate or do something on behalf of him.

Vincent was even more in awe of this bookstore owner's influence and threaded lightly. "Miss Cherry is really impressive. I've heard of her reputation for a long time and she has made quite a deep impression within the Ash Chamber of Commerce over the past few years. Mmm... she's really very great!"

Clearly, Vincent didn't boast much experience in praising others. Even though he very much wanted to curry favor with this bookstore owner who shared an 'extraordinary relationship' with the Chapman Witch, the priest could only mutter these few dry lines.

And that made him blush with inexplicable shame.

By logical reason, priests were supposed to be eloquent since they

had the responsibility of preaching and providing guidance. However, Vincent really wasn't that good with words and often let the nuns or other clergy members handle such work.

He usually didn't have to speak much when he came out to exorcise spirits and would usually use text messages to communicate effectively beforehand...

Father Vincent prayed that the bookstore owner wouldn't see his true thoughts behind his own dim-witted image.

"Haha, how so? Clearly, she was still an insensible child and was sniveling when she came over to buy books for the first time. However, she's a little fella with real talent and character, and I expect that she's probably grown a lot since then."

Lin Jie couldn't help smiling warmly when he recalled the first time he met this obstinate and pretty little lady for the first time.

He smiled as though he was a parent hearing compliments about his child's good grades.

Vincent was relieved. It appeared that Cherry was just a fellow customer of this bookstore, just that it seemed like she was on very good terms with the owner.

But... Sniveling?! Is that a proper description of the 'Chapman Witch'?!

Vincent couldn't help thinking that he had heard wrongly.

After his reminiscing was done, Lin Jie kept his expressions back in check and continued his lecturing, "In any case, I'll get Cherry to investigate the Ash Chamber of Commerce. Meanwhile, you should observe those others who are smoking the same substance as you after you get back.

"Take note of their usage quantity, side effects, similarities, and... Try to reach out to that Seventh Apostle you speak of. Let him know what's wrong with you and don't try to hide it."

Vincent hesitated for a bit. "Wouldn't that be inadvertently alarming them?"

Lin Jie chuckled, “This is to protect yourself from being exposed due to the effects as a result from halting usage of the drug. If they truly supply many clergy members with Holy Moon Essence, then surely you wouldn’t be suffering from anomalies. Don’t worry, there’s no way to avoid the risks of this kind of thing.

“At the end of the day, they aren’t trying to kill you but merely to get you all hooked. When you show them you are just being honest, it wouldn’t cause them to suspect you much and they would just continue scheming with means to brainwash you.

“On the contrary, if you act hesitant and try to cover it up, it means that you have perceived something wrong and no longer have absolute trust in them, see?”

Vincent nodded. “I understand.”

“Very well. It’s getting a little late, Father,” Lin Jie finally said with a tinge of humor. “Don’t keep my good neighbor waiting for too long. He’s still waiting for your ‘exorcism’ update. I fear that he might make a police report if you stay the night here.”

Then, he whispered, “Make a mental note if you notice anything that doesn’t seem right and tell me about it next time.

“Keep faith in yourself and you will see the light.”

After Mu’en helped record down the priest’s personal details and collected the deposit, Vincent respectfully took his leave.

His forehead was full of sweat and his blindfold was completely drenched with it.

Vincent couldn’t help letting out a deep breath once outside and finally un-clenched his tightly gripped fists.

That’s... way too frightening!

This was definitely the most mind-boggling ‘exorcism’ that Vincent had ever experienced. But for now, he needed to figure out how to appease the poor neighbor, Mr. Colin.

Vincent smiled wryly as he gazed at the book in his hand. Suddenly, a raspy, feminine voice sounded from behind him.

“A priest from the Church of the Dome?”

Vincent turned around in alarm and saw a pair of iron gray eyes, followed by a tall woman stepping out from the darkness. The lady was wielding a black cane and wore a blood-colored teardrop earring.

Her body emanated an eerie chill and a slight scent of blood, and Vincent sensed the same sort of terror he had when facing the countless vengeful souls within the stone gargoyles.

Alarm bells started ringing in Vincent's head.

Hunter! A powerful hunter of Pandemonium-rank or higher!

Chapter 111 Ji Zhixius

Repeated Visit

Chapter 111: Ji Zhixiu's Repeated Visit

This scent wasn't a result of being unable to wash away the blood of too many killings. Rather, it was a scent directly from the other party's body—The scent of 'sordid blood' unique only to hunters!

Through Vincent's 'Eyes of the Moon', the hunter seemed like a boiling furnace.

Blood bubbled aggressively within her, roaring and snaring menacingly as if she was a rabid beast in human form.

Danger! Danger! Danger!

Vincent's instincts were frantically warning him. He felt as if he was being watched by a predator in the shadows and his instinctive desire for survival was now on overdrive.

The priest stood rooted to the spot, unable to speak a word. He found it difficult to breathe and his head was spinning.

At that moment, he realized that the side effects of Holy Moon Essence which had been suppressed from shock had once again resurfaced and hit him much harder than before.

Along with his despair was an urge to cry.

He had left a little too hastily... and had left his holy emblem in the bookstore!

Vincent was a non-combat priest, now without any supplementary medium.

On top of that, the other being was one of those crazed hunters of a higher level than himself.

The outcome was already decided even before the battle began.

In his moment of fluster, Vincent suddenly realized that there was still an item in his hand that could act as a medium.

The book, Sun Scripture, which he had just gotten from the bookstore!

Although this wasn't an orthodox church medium, the fact that his holy emblem resonated with it was evidence that the two might have the same source, just that the emblem had displayed subservience, which was entirely feasible.

Vincent gritted his teeth, clutching the book in his hand, and prepared to invoke the divine power of the moon.

"Take it easy, Father."

The hunter chuckled and strode over. However, instead of looking at Vincent, she gazed at the bookstore.

"I mean you no harm," she said, "Just a little curious about the new customer. As fellow customers of the bookstore, we ought to get along nicely, otherwise Mr. Lin would be upset."

Customers... of the bookstore?

Other customers!

While in his state of momentary shock, the hunter had already passed him by. He vaguely saw two books and a box in her hand as she breezed past.

"That's a good book. Seems like Mr. Lin views you favorably."

Her parting sentence lingered in the wind.

When Vincent returned to his senses, he realized that he had already unconsciously infused his divine power into the book.

Within the vision of 'Eyes of the Moon', Sun Scripture was currently glowing with a luminescence that would be indiscernible to the

naked eye.

Warm energy from his hand flowed into Vincent's body, once again subduing all the ill effects in his body and forming a white barrier of light around him.

For real?!

Vincent had a complicated look on his face. He withdrew his divine power and the book dimmed down while the barrier vanished.

This time, he truly used his own body to feel the connection within the two.

He paused for a moment, then looked around at the fuzzy silhouettes in the bookstore.

He hesitated for some time before finally deciding that it would be too humiliating to head back in and say that he had left the holy emblem behind.

Vincent hadn't thought of it previously, but this bookstore surely had a lot of other customers like himself.

There was a hunter now, so it wouldn't be strange if there were witches, knights, and others of various factions.

It would seem really easy if the bookstore owner ever wanted to stir up a fuss.

"Never-mind, I'll just retrieve it next time. Since there aren't any assignments besides this one recently, it's time to have a break."

Vincent consoled himself as he kept Sun Scripture into his priest robes.

He would have to head to Colin's audio-visual store first.

Ji Zhixiu wasn't really concerned with this minor encounter. She pushed open the door of the bookstore and went inside.

While she might have been a little curious regarding what the priest

experienced in the bookstore, the difference in strength between the two of them was drastic and the priest had reacted like a frightened mouse at the sight of her.

Besides the book in his hand, he seemed just like any other priest from the Church of the Dome.

Therefore, she lost interest very quickly.

Perhaps the bookstore owner had a purpose for that priest, just like the initial Ji Zhixiu that had entered the bookstore.

But now, Ji Zhixiu was busy establishing her own force as quickly as possible and the Church of the Dome wouldn't be of much help to her, let alone a mere Abnormal-rank priest.

However, in this process, she seemed to experience what Wilde had probably felt when he first ran into her at the entrance of the bookstore. A weird sense of amusement.

They were all beings with no connection to one another, but now had a subtle link because each of them became a customer of the bookstore.

Having been through this before, it was difficult to not feel like a senior towards this newcomer.

Perhaps... we can be considered as 'book pals'? Mused Ji Zhixiu to herself.

Lin Jie had just picked up the holy emblem on the table when he noticed the familiar figure entering.

With a surprised smile, he greeted, "Oh? It's been a while, Young Miss Ji. Have you finished reading all the books?"

"Long time no see, Mr. Lin."

Ji Zhixiu bowed respectfully and handed over the two books—***Blood & Beast*** as well as ***Steel Resolve*** .

"There's still a long way to go before I'll be able to master all these.

At my current level, it is too difficult to completely understand everything. Moreover, the borrowing period of a month is nearly over, so I came here to return the books first.”

Ji Zhixiu then probed cautiously, “Can I come and borrow these two books again at a later date?”

Would anyone in the right mind say no to a regular customer?

Lin Jie smiled and gave a nod. “Knowing to not bite off more than you can chew is a good thing. If you can master these two books and understand everything they contain, it will be a great advantage that will benefit you all your life. Some people read many books throughout their lives, but they actually don’t understand anything at all.”

Ji Zhixiu nodded her head in agreement.

Just a preliminary understanding of these two books had already gotten her close to Destructive-rank. Who knew the level she could achieve if she was to completely master them.

Ji Zhixiu observed the interior of the bookstore.

This was the first time she had been back after the entire saga with the Magic Ovum Mirror concluded.

The bookstore hadn’t seemed to change, and the only difference was a young girl standing by Lin Jie’s side now.

Lin Jie didn’t make a record on the register after taking the books and instead handed it over to that young girl.

“Mu’en, my new assistant.” He told Ji Zhixiu.

Assistant?

Ji Zhixiu narrowed her eyes and scrutinized the girl. There was a very peculiar scent... not like a human, but a cold steel or plastic instead.

She gave a nod to Mu’en. “Hello.”

Mu'en returned with a nod as well. "Hello."

Ji Zhixiu's gaze returned back to Lin Jie. She placed the box she was carrying onto the counter and whispered, "Thank you for your guidance, Mr. Lin. I have already gotten my revenge. But I still have some follow-up troubles to deal with... And wish to ask for your help in opening this box."

Lin Jie's eyes fell on that square brass box engraved with strange patterns.

Has she relied on her own resolve and gotten her revenge on the scumbag?

Is this box her follow-up troubles?

Could there be a token of love inside? Or some sort of photograph?

"Is this what he left behind?" asked Lin Jie as he shifted the box over for a closer look.

Chapter 112 Opened It By Accident

Chapter 112: Opened It By Accident

“Is this what he left behind?”

Lin Jie eyed the brass box before him.

This was a cube with sides of approximately 20 centimeters long. It seemed heavy and each face was adorned with intricate and mysterious patterns.

There was a slight square concave on the top face, and each of the cube's eight corners was inlaid with a ruby the size of a fingernail, joining the formation as a whole and 'locking' the box.

Without a doubt, this was an exotic and exquisite piece. It seemed very expensive and befitting a 'rich person' like Ji Zhixiu.

Indeed, someone who can be a 'scumbag' to this affluent young lady definitely wouldn't be any ordinary man.

If it was as Lin Jie suspected, the box might be filled with tokens of love, or perhaps photographs or other items left behind by the scumbag to threaten Ji Zhixiu with.

Therefore, it meant that this box was equivalent to a safe.

Making a safe seem like a treasure box was an absolutely despicable act by that scumbag.

Lin Jie had a look of subtle disgust.

Ji Zhixiu watched Lin Jie's expression as he surveyed the box. When she saw the slight disgust in his eyes, she felt her heart tighten and she gripped her cane harder.

Damn it, the seal on this box is too simple, isn't it? Does Mr. Lin think

that I'm wasting his time by bringing such a trivial matter to him?

She didn't know much about the sigils used by white magicians, but the fact that Heris kept the Sky Wolf's sordid blood formulation inside this box meant that he believed it to be safe.

This was the basis of a hunter organization!

The man who had single-handedly made White Wolf one of the top hunter organizations in the whole of Norzin definitely wouldn't be careless with this.

Even though he had been corrupted by the Magic Ovum Mirror in the past month, gradually losing his mind and dying as a fanatic martyr, the fact remained that Heris was ever calm, scheming, and intelligent before all this.

Ji Zhixiu had spent quite some time within White Wolf. She wouldn't have joined White Wolf if she wasn't satisfied back then.

After all, the support from Ji Bonong gave her more than enough options to take her pick from.

Heris was a consummate leader and schemer.

This bit could still be seen when he was under the influence of the Magic Ovum Mirror for a week.

At that time, he had made use of Kaji's death to escape, turning to Scarlet Cult and using them as a shield, as well as making use of Charles' corpse in an attempt to assassinate Wilde.

In that final underground stronghold, Ji Zhixiu had obtained some clues that were sufficient enough for her to piece together a rough truth.

These three incidents had been carried out by Heris, very quickly and stealthily, just that the third incident was suddenly exposed for some unknown reason which led to the rapid demise of Scarlet Cult...

Of course, Ji Zhixiu was aware that something had definitely gone

on behind the scenes. After all, Wilde was addressed as 'Old Wil' by the bookstore owner and was also a fellow customer.

But as the Magic Ovum Mirror's influence deepened, Heris was gradually consumed by the beastly nature of the sordid blood. He lost his ability to think rationally, and when eventually he was overcome by madness, his demise was already set in stone.

All in all, even in his most deranged state, Heris didn't forget to bring the formula with him, showing how important it was.

The sealing sigil on this box definitely wouldn't be simple given how precious the formula was to a cautious man like Heris.

However, while the sigil might be extremely difficult for people like her to crack, it might not necessarily be so for the bookstore owner.

She bowed her head and said, "Uh, these are his remnants. It may seem insignificant to you, but this is a very important step for me. Please do me this favor and I'll repay you with everything I have."

Remnants...

Lin Jie's lips twitched slightly. Forget it, the revenge plots of rich people always tended to have corpses stuffed in concrete.

Someone who had the audacity to try and rip off the young heiress of such a giant corporation would have probably guessed how he was going to end up, huh...

Struggling for a few rounds is honestly remarkable.

Hopefully, he was genuinely remorseful at his time of passing.

"This box is rather interesting... Besides, I don't need any form of repayment from you."

Lin Jie revealed a slight smile. "I gave you guidance back then only because you needed it."

This was true indeed. In the beginning, when Ji Zhixiu hadn't even revealed her name, Lin Jie had still helped her out.

"I misspoke, I am sorry." Ji Zhixiu nodded in shame, her pale face flushing red.

She regretted it as soon as she had said it. Wasn't everything she had now given to her by Mr. Lin? It was too ungrateful to mention repaying. She ought to have given him everything in the first place.

"There's nothing to apologize for, just remember to come and read some books from time to time." Lin Jie shook his head as he prepared to enter therapy mode.

It would be good to chat a little with this young lady first, so he shifted the box to the side and gestured for Mu'en to take care of it.

However, he was still rather curious as to why this affluent young lady had specially chosen him to help unlock the box.

Hmm... It could either be that she trusts me... or that there aren't too many people she can trust on her side.

Right, thought Lin Jie to himself as he recalled that subordinate of Ji Zhixiu who had run off after accompanying her to the bookstore. That fellow had practically returned back to report on the young miss' rebellious actions.

If even her own subordinate dared to tell on her, then this young lady wouldn't be as free as Lin Jie imagined. She would always live in the shadow of her father.

Under such circumstances, there was really a shortage of people that she could trust.

There were probably some serious issues between her and her family, especially with Ji Bonong, otherwise, she wouldn't have fallen into such a state where she got involved with a scumbag.

Who knows if Ji Bonong had spoken with her about it the last time.

Lin Jie pondered for a bit, then decided to just ask what was on his mind, "Did your father speak with you?"

Ji Zhixiu's eyes widened. As expected of Mr. Lin to know about it

already.

She nodded. “He came to see me a while ago, but he clearly still sees me as a child even though I have already grown up.”

Lin Jie could hear the pride in her voice and thus smiled. “Looks like you’ve convinced him. Congratulations.”

“Yes, I have already successfully convinced him to stand on my side. He would like to come down in person and speak with you regarding more distribution channels for the books in your bookstore... Please forgive me for taking the liberty of giving him suggestions, for he would not have allowed me to continue otherwise.”

Lin Jie blinked. *Wait a minute, Young Miss Ji, what exactly did you talk with your father about?!*

A top tycoon having taken a fancy to a small retail shop and wanted to collaborate was excessively ridiculous.

While it might not necessarily be a bad thing, it would definitely be a nuisance without much actual room for cooperation.

However, since this was some sincere intentions from the young lady, Lin Jie nodded his head and said, “Alright, I got it.”

Still, Lin Jie couldn’t help gazing at Ji Zhixiu with a bit of helplessness. Shaking his head, he sighed, “You need to find some people that you can trust and not always come to me for such simple matters.”

Ji Zhixiu felt that the bookstore owner was looking at her as if she was a kid that had not grown up yet and was doing something unreliable.

She opened her mouth, wanting to speak. *Could opening this box really be that simple...*

While she could get the magician employed by the family to open the box.

Realizing that the 'loyalty' brand on 'Rat' Ruen had been broken made her suspect that there was a traitor amongst white magicians that had sold out the method of removing the 'loyalty' brand.

In her helplessness, she had no choice but to turn to the bookstore...

Click!

The two of them turned towards the source of the mechanical whirl sound and saw Mu'en holding the box with one of her palms placed in the center of it.

The entire box was divided into four parts and had opened like flower petals. The four corners at the top were the apex of the 'petals' and split outward about thirty degrees.

And at the very center of the box, the concave portion had turned into a 'lid' which Mu'en had picked up.

The young girl was expressionless, but there was a slight hint of surprise in her eyes as she met the gaze of the two others before she placed the lid back on awkwardly.

"Oh, I opened it by accident."

Chapter 113 The Strong Have Their Own Principles

Chapter 113: The Strong Have Their Own Principles

Opened it... by accident?!

Ji Zhixiu stared at the opened brass box in a daze.

There were still some traces of the aetheric ripple that had dissipated. It was as if an invisible lock had been broken and some minute changes to the glossy surface remained.

Blood seemed to 'overflow', exuding an evil scent.

However, it was just an illusion and in the next second, it was only a faint, dim light being emitted from within the box.

Lin Jie didn't react either. He had merely passed the item for Mu'en to hold on to temporarily. Just a few moments without supervision and she opened the box?

Ever since he had saved Mu'en, this child was usually extremely curious towards everyday things and would want to touch everything she saw. Giving her such a lego-like box was asking for it.

Moreover, with that crazy learning ability of hers, being able to open the box's lock wasn't all that strange.

Never mind, what's done is done. Young Miss Ji's request was to open this box as well.

There wasn't any essential difference whether it was his assistant or Lin Jie himself doing the opening.

However, this child had touched others belongings without permission and this was still something left behind by the scumbag... that might be used for blackmail and could make Ji

Zhixiu uncomfortable.

This child still needed to properly apologize.

As the two adults watched, Mu'en pushed the box forward to Lin Jie, then quickly put her hands behind her back, like a child caught doing something wrong.

She looked at Lin Jie guiltily and mumbled, "I just wanted to try."

You just wanted to try, so you tried it and it opened just like that?

Even if the sigils sealing the box are simple, the sheer number of sigils on the box requires a white magician proficient in this aspect!

Is this young girl actually a white magician proficient in sigils?!

Ji Zhixiu no longer doubted as her thoughts reached this point. On the contrary, she felt that it was to be expected. *She's Mr. Lin's assistant after all!*

Ji Zhixiu nodded her head. A being capable of being an assistant here definitely wouldn't be ordinary indeed.

While Ji Zhixiu was thinking things through, Lin Jie pushed the box to Ji Zhixiu with an apologetic smile. "Kids tend to be ignorant and like to touch things anyhow. I apologize.

"Her mind still isn't too sound yet. Although she is very talented in certain areas, she still lacks common sense and I haven't taught her how to behave with others yet."

Mu'en blinked her eyes several times, then nodded gravely, "Umm."

Your 'child touching things anyhow' refers to breaking the seal sigil of this box where the cautious Heris had stored away the original formula? This is even scarier than 'just wanting to try'...

Ji Zhixiu cursed silently but her expression changed when she realized another layer of meaning behind Lin Jie's words... This young girl who could be a 'white magician' was actually being taught by Mr. Lin.

Her mind wasn't sound, and lack of common sense as well as the feeling Ji Zhixiu had just now...

Could it be...

Ji Zhixiu's heart raced as a frightening thought ran through her mind. But because it was so terrible, she could only stop herself from visualizing further and said with a forced smile, "It's alright. Mr. Lin is someone I respect and trust, so is your assistant. There's no need for me to hide this."

Lin Jie shook his head. This young lady was just too trusting and it was no wonder she got played.

Even though she said she trusted Teacher Lin and it was of course Lin Jie that had guided her and gained her trust, this didn't stop him from thinking that Ji Zhixiu exposed some of her weaknesses too easily.

Putting it to a count, he and Young Miss Ji had only met three times. Even if he was deserving of her trust, it didn't mean that anyone who appeared at his side was the same.

Lin Jie looked at Ji Zhixiu and fell into his usual chin-on-palms pose.

"I remember telling you the saying, 'Hell is other people.' In fact, I've frequently shared this with others but very few remember it and they would ultimately end up paying either a small or heavy price.

"I hope you don't repeat the same mistakes and think about how you felt back when you were first betrayed.

"I will discipline Mu'en on my end, but you ought to be more careful. After all these are your private things."

'But you won't deceive me. You are able to see everything that I have, and there's no reason for me to be prudent.'

Ji Zhixiu wished to say all these with reverence and even felt a little wronged. However, since it was Lin Jie who had spoken, she could

only lower her head obediently. “I will, thank you for reminding me.”

However, the strong had their own principles. Mr. Lin didn’t care for the item inside the box.

Perhaps, no, he probably doesn’t care. It’s merely an original formula, something that an entity like Mr. Lin would be used to.

While these thoughts ran through her mind, Ji Zhixiu’s eyes had already turned to the opened brass box.

The inside of the box was lined with black velvet, and sunken in the center was a small crystalline glass sealed at the top by a cork. Contained within a tube was a scarlet viscous liquid.

That thick and dark red blood roiled continuously within the tube, throbbing and contracting against the tube wall as though it was alive and glowed with a gem-like luster.

Light refracting through the transparent crystalline glass and blood illuminated the box’s interior with a bright and sinister red glow.

So beautiful, so alluring... This was the original formula of sordid blood that contained the power of a dream beast.

Thump! Thump!

Ji Zhixiu’s heart pounded in sync to the contractions of the blood, and she felt an instinctive shudder.

Because the sordid blood within her was also from the Sky Wolf, hence this throbbing.

This meant that the original formula was the real deal!

“Huu...”

Ji Zhixiu stared at the reagent tube within the box and breathed a sigh of relief. This represented that she now had a new hunter organization with their own roots.

Possessing the formula and replacing the original White Wolf. They were the true orthodox!

The huge weight in Ji Zhixiu's heart was lifted and she felt much more at ease. But then, her eyes fell on the sides of the brass box.

Between the brass-adorned box walls and the black velvet at the inner bottom were some crumpled parchment.

Ji Zhixiu reached out for the parchment and smoothed it out. There were two pieces in total and were all secret messages addressed to Heris.

Chapter 114 Two Secret Letters

Chapter 114: Two Secret Letters

Out of caution, Ji Zhixiu didn't immediately check the contents of the letters.

Since this was a box sealed by a white magician, it was possible those letters were too. She would be falling into a trap if there were sigils on them as well.

Like the books in the bookstore, a white magician's sigils also possessed the power to affect the minds and souls of those who even glanced at them.

Ji Zhixiu stared at the two letters in her hands, her expression grave.

In the dim light of the bookstore, she momentarily lost herself in thought.

The fact that Heris placed them in the box containing the original formula suggests that the letters must have been important, or even on par with the formula.

However, the sordid blood formulation already represented the basis of a hunter organization as well as the source of all the hunter's power.

Putting herself in the shoes of a hunter, as well as the founder of a hunter organization, Ji Zhixiu couldn't imagine anything that could match the importance of a sordid blood formula for a leader.

Much less two letters.

What Ji Zhixiu found strange was that these two letters could be destroyed to keep the contents secret and there wouldn't be a need to hide them away in this box.

As a hunter on the verge of reaching Destructive-rank, Heris

couldn't have been so forgetful that he would need to read the letter so often to remember its contents.

Ji Zhixiu had some suspicions, but as her thoughts flowed, a notion popped up in her mind and it got stronger by the minute.

Unless... The source of the original formula is written on this letter!

Ji Zhixiu's heart pounded rapidly and she licked her lips subconsciously. She glanced at Lin Jie and saw that the bookstore owner had picked up a book to read and wasn't paying any heed.

Since there was no activity from the bookstore owner, did it mean that it was... safe?

Ji Zhixiu nodded slowly, taking it as a sort of tacit approval from Lin Jie. However, her face darkened after she picked the letters and read them.

The two letters were written exactly 30 years apart.

And they were both sent from the same place.

— The same faint, red watermark, a symbol of a sword and a surrounding spiral of flame, was printed on both letters.

These letters were sent to the same person.

—The Heris from 30 years ago who had just become a hunter, and the White Wolf leader Heris from 30 years later.

Heris was once very famous amongst hunters.

This was partly due to the White Wolf's steady growth in the three decades of his leadership, and partly because of his strength and intelligence.

Even though Heris ultimately met a horrid demise, it couldn't erase any of his former glory.

Most importantly, he had started from nothing, a nameless hunter without any background who inadvertently obtained the original

formula and climbed to where he was.

However, nobody knew where he got the original formula from.

Most people put this as a 'fortuitous occurrence,' since it had happened quite a long time ago and it was very difficult to know what had happened unless they were the ones involved.

Also, nobody truly bothered with such a tiny detail.

But right now, Ji Zhixiu finally understood exactly how Heris had gotten his formula...

Thirty years ago, this letter and the original formula had found its way to Heris.

On the letter, it wrote: Accept it and the dealings between us are established. Henceforth, a powerful hunter organization will rise and you no longer have to be trash sitting on the corner.

We guarantee that there isn't anything wrong with the formula and no one will find any problems with it. All you need to do is inject yourself with the sordid blood to gain your power.

Whether the name Heris goes down in history trampled on in the dirt or dazzles like the stars in the sky... Only you can decide it.

Thirty years ago, such enticing words in the letter made their way to a young and poor youth who had just become a hunter.

And from what came after, it was evident that Heris accepted this deal and eventually became the leader of White Wolf.

However, there was no such thing as a free lunch. Surely, there would be a hidden price to pay involved, which would also be the reason why this mysterious organization had given the formula to Heris in the first place.

"So this is the true origin of White Wolf." Ji Zhixiu's eyes narrowed. An organization that could casually give the formula to a small and obscure hunter definitely possessed fearsome power.

However, she had never seen the watermark on this letter before, which meant that they kept themselves very well hidden.

The other letter, which was only sent recently, had a very simple content.

In seven days, a magic ovum mirror will be released from the dream realm at 27th Avenue. Acquire it and you will obtain the opportunity to rise to Destructive-rank.

Ji Zhixiu's pupils contracted. This was where information about the Magic Ovum Mirror came from!

And at that time, Heris wasn't going to get rid of the Magic Ovum Mirror. From the beginning, his intention was to acquire and use it to rise up to Destructive-rank.

However, he never imagined that the ending of his story would be rewritten the moment he touched it.

This mysterious organization must have made Heris do other things in these thirty years, grooming him every step of the way before leading him towards destruction.

Heris had only placed this letter along with the original letter into this box. Could he have already foreseen his impending demise and thus kept these two letters hoping to expose this organization...

Or rather, drag them down along with himself in his desperation.

Ji Zhixiu recalled the deranged manner of Heris, arms raised in the last moments of the rain.

It was hard to imagine what exactly was going on in his mind at that time.

Between sobriety and madness, discovering that he was a mere puppet, a pitiful creature manipulated by fate... yet could only rush towards that gigantic rain god...

Out of respect, Lin Jie didn't peek at the contents of the box. However, he could see the expression on Ji Zhixiu's face.

Incredulity, followed by enlightenment, then turning into panic and pity appeared on her face.

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow, as he imagined the twists and turns of the plot.

It seems like the scumbag who intentionally cheated Miss Ji's feelings had quite the complicated background.

“Gang criminal activity?” Lin Jie put down his book as he displayed his life mentor, chicken soup distributor and relationship guru side for himself and asked with a tad of curiosity, “He was being instructed like a chess piece, with greater benefits behind it all, am I right?”

“Looks like your revenge is far from concluded...”

Chapter 115 Scumbag Gang

Chapter 115: Scumbag Gang

Lin Jie felt that his own speculation couldn't be any more reasonable.

Firstly, to cause a reaction of incredulity meant that the letter contents were beyond what Ji Zhixiu expected.

Say, what could a lady hurt by a scumbag expect from letters left behind by him?

Two things. Either blackmail, or a confession of regret. These two sides would have been within young Miss Ji's scope of expectations.

If it weren't even these two scenarios, then there was definitely a deeper and more warped story behind it.

However, after that it seemed like Ji Zhixiu received an epiphany, meaning that the doubts in her heart were answered. That meant the truth behind it was in line with logic.

And following that was the most crucial bit. Dread and lingering fear!

Why dread? Naturally, it was from seeing the actual conspiracy of the letter which was many more times worse than the scumbag playing with her feelings. If she hadn't enacted her revenge at that time, who knows how severe the consequences would have been.

Something capable of making Young Miss Ji feel dread was definitely an issue that played on her emotions.

And the lingering fear showed how serious it was.

The influence of the matter had already risen to a level where it was beyond personal.

Then, for Young Miss Ji, it could only mean that it involved her

father, Ji Bonong, and Rolle Resource Development.

And the part of pity was because the scumbag was swiftly gotten rid of by Young Miss Ji and buried in concrete before he could even enact the true conspiracy.

So, at the end of this roller-coaster of emotions, there was still a happy undertone.

A series of emotional twists and turns seemed rather consistent with Lin Jie's speculation.

In a way, some of Lin Jie's own doubts were answered.

What sort of people had the gall to have designs on the young miss of Rolle Resource Development and eventually jilt her, causing Ji Zhixiu to walk in the rain and wander into the bookstore with a look of disappointment on her face?

With this reasoning, the whole matter became a lot clearer.

This wasn't a mere betrayal. Instead, it was a conspiracy of fraud and murder by a syndicate!

That scumbag's true target was Ji Bonong, and behind him was a 'scumbag syndicate' who had plotted this entire thing. What they truly targeted wasn't the affections of women, but wealth.

Moreover, it wasn't any small fortune they were aiming for. With such a great appetite, they were going for Rolle Resource Development Corporation.

Lin Jie thought that perhaps the monopoly Rolle Resource Development held had lasted far too long, leading to dissatisfaction from other enterprises.

And so, they tried to use Ji Zhixiu as a breakthrough point...

Ji Zhixiu's reactions ascertained Lin Jie's guess.

Young Lady Ji nodded gravely. "Yes, this organization is incredibly powerful and well hidden. I'm afraid Heris was merely just one of

their pawns. Just the thought of them being able to control a person's life in their hands scares me.

“However, things will be even more terrifying than I thought.

“My revenge has a long way to go. But this time, it's not just about me.”

She folded the two pieces of paper and put them back into a slit within the box.

Her gaze fell on the tube of scarlet liquid.

Her power would truly be established with the original formula now in her hands.

Is Heris the name of that philandering scoundrel? Lin Jie couldn't help picking up his cup and having a sip of tea. It seemed that this fellow wasn't merely being used, but he was an entirely molded tool at their disposal.

It was no wonder Young Lady Ji had an expression of pity.

However, saying that it wasn't just about her this time meant that Rolle Resource Development was going after this organization now.

Lin Jie pondered for a moment. This sort of corporate warfare was something he didn't have much knowledge on.

Thus he could only remind her. “Ask your father to be more careful. Since you think that this organization is frightening, they might pose a slight threat to Rolle Resource Development.

“Don't be careless, for the other party would resort to all sorts of methods.”

He sighed inwardly. From an emotional dispute to corporate warfare...

Things were just getting more and more interesting.

“Thank you for your reminder, I'll keep your words in mind.” Lin

Jie's words made Ji Zhixiu turn solemn.

She had to warn her father regarding this matter indeed.

Ji Zhixiu was now representing Rolle Resource Development and slowly stepping onto the stage of transcendent beings. She might face off against age-old factions, and these would no longer be like the tiny scuffles of the past.

A single moment of carelessness could greatly affect Rolle Resource Development.

Especially since they were in the light while that other organization hid in the shadows. Who knew how many other transcendent beings were being groomed to do their bidding, just like Heris.

Ji Zhixiu's considerations hadn't been thorough enough. But fortunately, she had Mr. Lin.

As Ji Zhixiu silently congratulated herself for entering the bookstore on that rainy night, she suddenly had a thought that couldn't be ignored.

Thinking about it, Mr. Lin's approach was somewhat similar to the way in which that organization primed Heris. Both provide help in secret, followed by giving a mission.

Could it be that...

Mr. Lin was living in seclusion over here, setting things up and pulling strings just to play a game with a shadowy organization that she never knew existed?!

No one knew how many times the two sides had pitted themselves against one another. But the most recent was the Magic Ovum Mirror incident and clearly, it had ultimately ended in the bookstore owner's victory.

Ji Zhixiu's heart beat rapidly as she stared at the box before her, feeling that she had uncovered a terrifying truth yet again...

If this was all according to Mr. Lin's plans, this original formula was

her reward.

Lin Jie interrupted her chain of thought. “Oh, by the way, since you are here, I still have one more thing to ask of you.”

“It’s my honor to do anything for you,” replied Ji Zhixiu at once.

“It’s like this.” Lin Jie cleared his throat. “A customer of mine, Burton Ackerman, lost his job recently and is in poor spirits. Perhaps you could offer him a new job.”

Ji Zhixiu was momentarily stunned for a moment, then reacted.

‘Pale Night-watcher’ Burton Ackerman? The hunter who recently took on Wilde’s bounty as a test for ascension to Destructive-rank?!

Ackerman’s decision to abandon the Wilde mission had only been announced by the Truth Union a few days prior. This previously obscure hunter had gained near an instant reputation, but it was largely infamy.

Many people reckoned that this fellow was a coward who chose to run from a fight, but there was hearsay that Wilde wasn’t actually badly injured and got his Destructive-rank prowess returned so Ackerman’s decision to give up was far-seeing and rational.

But in any case, among the hunter community, Ackerman was well and truly famous.

Is this what the bookstore owner meant by ‘lost his job’?

But Wilde is a customer of the bookstore too. That means to say, this entire matter is secretly manipulated by Mr. Lin!

To call this ‘unemployment’... Mr. Lin is really humorous.

“I’m more than happy to offer him a new job!”

Ji Zhixiu would be foolish to give up on a hunter on the verge of Destructive-rank. Now, her organization had a formula to act as its pillar as well as a high level fighting force.

As expected of Mr. Lin to have taken everything into consideration.

“Very well, give me a suitable address and I’ll get him to seek you out,” said Lin Jie with a nod of his head.

As expected of Young Miss Ji. Providing a job at once. Rich people sure are decisive indeed , Lin Jie thought to himself.

Chapter 116 May I Have Your Rose

Chapter 116: May I Have Your Rose

“It’s getting late. You should head home early if there’s nothing else. It’s still rather dangerous for you to be out alone at night.”

Now that things were all settled, Lin Jie was ready to see off this customer.

Of course, this wasn’t an order to leave. If it was still daytime, Lin Jie would love to chat more with Young Miss Ji. After all, she was a super huge client.

Even if she doesn’t buy it herself, she could recommend a bunch of friends too, like Miss Doris.

The problem was that it was around nine at night when Vincent got here. Their chat ended past ten before Ji Zhixiu came, and it was already close to 11 p.m. now.

Normally, 11 p.m. was the time Lin Jie usually closed his doors and headed for bed.

He put down his cup and looked at the sky outside, feeling as though he had just lied through his teeth. How is this considered getting late? It’s almost midnight already!

Young Miss Ji was rather brave indeed. She dared venture out at night to one of the more isolated neighborhoods even though she was a rather pretty young lady.

Security around here has never been very good.

“Since that’s the case, I’ll head on back first and await Mr. Ackerman’s arrival,” said Ji Zhixiu, nodding her head.

Although she was already a hunter close to Destructive-rank and

could be considered a ‘powerhouse’, the people who came and went to the bookstore were various veteran powers with all sorts of ideas.

Indeed, they could still pose quite a bit of danger to her.

If it weren’t for the importance of the original formula, she would have brought along some subordinates.

Ji Zhixiu stood up to pack her things, closed the box, and prepared to leave.

At this moment, Lin Jie felt a tug on his sleeves. He turned over and saw Mu’en’s clear bright eyes looking at him, then her gaze shifted to the box on the counter-top.

Staring with fixation...

Lin Jie understood at once. This child had taken a fancy to the box.

It was pretty and shiny, and Mu’en couldn’t help playing with and opening it. *She probably likes it a lot.*

Boss Lin felt a little embarrassed. Even though this sort of remnants from a past cheating scumbag would most likely be taken to be destroyed and buried, the box itself seemed a little expensive...

He deliberated for a moment, then decided to try his luck still.

“Wait, my assistant seems to like that box. Is it possible—”

Before the sentence was complete, Ji Zhixiu had put the box down after a slight moment of hesitation. She took out the contents of it, then pushed the box over.

“Not a problem.”

Lin Jie didn’t know what to think and could only smile. “Well, I don’t really have anything valuable to exchange for it. Is there anything in the bookstore you want?”

Ji Zhixiu was first stunned. This was followed by a sense of ecstasy and exhilaration as her eyes roamed the entire bookstore.

Without the seal on the brass box, the scent of the original formula would leak out, which was bound to attract some coveters. The Sky Wolf was a Destructive-rank dream beast and produced high-grade sordid blood.

Perhaps even Destructive-rank powerhouses would be enticed.

Ji Zhixiu reckoned that the bookstore owner was giving her another test of her abilities.

So even though there were dangers, she still chose to hand over the box.

However, it appeared that her decisiveness earned some favor with the bookstore owner, and she was given a chance to ease the difficulty of the impending challenge.

Ji Zhixiu needed to grasp this chance well!

Furthermore, Mr. Lin had said ‘anything’ in the bookstore. That meant to say, it wasn’t limited to just books, but other items were applicable as well.

Every one of the books in the bookstore contained limitless secrets and power, but they wouldn’t improve one’s strength in just a short period of time. Right now, Ji Zhixiu also had no way of judging how much books could help her in her current situation.

Naturally, Ji Zhixiu thought of the stone gargoyle first, but its power level was only at Pandemonium-rank. It would mean just getting an assistant of a similar rank to her could only provide her limited help.

She pondered for a moment, and her gaze fell onto the red rose which she was attracted to yet frightened her...

The rose on the counter hadn’t been here during her last visit. It was probably a new addition in this period.

The beautiful rose that had been maintaining its bud shape all these time seemed to notice her gaze. Its petals quiver slightly, revealing an eyeball as a wave of avaricious malice swept across the room.

Ji Zhixiu broke out in a cold sweat, vaguely sensing an immense threat to her soul.

But when that threat arose, the myriad of invisible tentacles of ‘Steel Resolve,’ which was produced by her soul that lay dormant behind her all this while, sprung alive and blocked that sensation.

This flower... is terrifying.

Her current strength could not contend with this fearsome sensation and she needed to entirely rely on ‘Steel Resolve’ to barely be able to stop it.

Ji Zhixiu could sense that this flower didn’t have any real intention of making a move and just wanted to scare her out of mischief.

However, she now thought, *Wouldn’t this be the best assistance?*

“Huu...”

Ji Zhixiu raised a finger and pointed at the rose. “The rose, may I have it?”

Lin Jie was slightly stunned.

The rose...

In a room filled with books and an exquisitely crafted stone gargoyles, what did wanting the rose mean?

Lin Jie didn’t spend too much time dwelling on it. In every way, this rose was probably the lowest valued item in the bookstore. Moreover, regardless of Earth or Azir, the meaning of a rose probably hasn’t changed from ancient times to the present.

But these were all Lin Jie’s own opinions. Ji Zhixiu was entitled to her choice if she wanted the rose and Lin Jie readily agreed, giving her the flower and even the pot.

As he watched the customer leave with a happy smile on her face, Lin Jie rested his chin on palms and gazed at the empty space on the counter, lost in thought.

Central District, Machine Loop

Andrew stood before Factory 01 that was currently being reconstructed.

After the Magic Ovum Mirror incident, he had made use of the emergency regulations to keep a hold of his position for the time being. However, that came at the cost of having to be monitored. On top of that, he was assigned here to supervise and search for clues of the attackers rather than be involved in the decision making of other matters.

During this attack, a total of three factories, 01, 07, and 13 were severely damaged. 01 was where blood-line related drug experiments were conducted, 07 was the housing facility of the ‘Clay Idol Project’, and 13 was a storage warehouse.

What all three had in common was that the explosions were caused by the detonation of a philosopher’s stone from within — These were the only three factories that required philosopher’s stone during the recent period, making it even more convenient for the mole.

There’s no doubt that the mole is still on the move, yet they drastically reduced my authority... That’s just ridiculous!

No, perhaps the mole is someone high up...

He paced around, glaring icily at the lower ranking scholars that were doing the rebuilding works.

The long-distance receiver in his ear sounded, causing him to halt in his tracks.

“Vice-Chairman, those ‘Truth-seekers’ already know. This bunch of crazy knowledge-hungry lunatics is very interested in the bookstore...”

Andrew’s expression darkened at once. He had already rescinded this order some time ago!

Someone had overwrote his order to rescind.

Chapter 117 Walpurgis

Chapter 117: Walpurgis

Lin Jie pondered for a while, sighed, then got up to close for the day. Suddenly, he caught sight of the silver emblem on the counter-top.

He had been so caught up in the conversation and totally forgotten that the holy emblem was still on the tabletop. Later on, the priest didn't mention it as well.

Now that the flower pot was gone, this holy emblem was more conspicuous as it showed a warm radiance.

"Ah, Father Vincent left in such a hurry that he forgot to take his holy emblem."

Lin Jie picked up the emblem and scrutinized the object. This holy emblem from the Church of the Dome was rather well-crafted and cold to the touch. Moreover, the clean design and wavy dark patterns had a sort of calming effect.

The Church of the Dome had a knack for doing things, for the religion to have flourished in Norzin for so many years.

"I would have been able to go next door and look for the Father if I had found this earlier, but then I ended up chatting with young Miss Ji.

"He didn't return after such a long time, so he might have really forgotten about it and left already.

"I guess, I'll just have to return it back to him on his next visit. Such an expensive item mustn't be casually misplaced, haa..."

Lin Jie studied the holy emblem in his hand, then turned towards Mu'en, his gaze landing on the box she was hugging.

Isn't this a coincidence?

I just received a usable 'safe' just moments ago.

This child looks like she's going to treat it like a treasure and probably won't misplace it.

Lin Jie placed the emblem on the top of the box, then instructed Mu'en to carefully look after them till the priest returned for it.

"Like I mentioned just now, we'll take this as your punishment. Make sure to safe-keep them well.

"Mm." Mu'en nodded, placing the emblem inside the box and closing it once again before staring blankly at the sigils on the brass box.

When she looked up, Lin Jie had already locked the front door.

He patted Mu'en's head as he passed by and said, "Time for you to head to bed. Your new identity will be settled when personnel from the Ash Chamber of Commerce come. Oh right, I'll have to ask them to help with some slight remodeling of the second floor so that you'll have a bedroom."

As he walked up, Lin Jie casually joked with Mu'en. "If you have time, think about what other furniture we could have... It's best to make the most of what we can get. [T/N- Lin Jie uses a Chinese saying where the literal translation is that the poor should take tufts of wool when shearing sheep for lining their own clothes etc, for the rich sheep owner wouldn't notice it]

Lin Jie said the last sentence softly, but Mu'en heard it clearly.

The artificial human pondered for a bit, then nodded earnestly.

Furniture... Wool... Boss wants a wool carpet.

—Evidently, her grasp of commonly used sayings still wasn't good enough.

Lin Jie did want to renovate the second floor indeed. He had always been using the original layout of the bookstore and hadn't made any major changes. Originally, it was rather comfortable for him

alone, but things were different with another person added.

There wasn't much space on the second floor, with the bedroom which doubled up as a study and the kitchen occupying most of the space. Basically all that remained was just a small space which Lin Jie used daily to work out.

The bedroom was now Mu'en's and he could only sleep at the workout area on his shoddily put-together wooden bed. On top of that, the huge sword was also kept there.

But continuing on like this wasn't an option. Since it just so happened that he had contacted Cherry recently, Lin Jie felt that he should make full use of it...

After Mu'en came up as well, Lin Jie wished her a good night and reminded her to change her dressings.

Only after watching her close the bedroom door did he head to his makeshift bed.

Mu'en closed the door and stood on the spot till there was no longer any activity outside. Then, she headed to the bedside and placed the brass box at the head of the bed.

The first aid kit was placed on the bedside table. Mu'en stripped off her clothes, revealing a startling sight of a pale slender body covered with bandages.

Bandages fell onto the floor in loops, stacked on top of each other.

Mu'en used a wet towel to wipe off any remaining ointment on her body, cleaned her wounds, and reapplied ointment before bandaging herself up once again.

The main injuries were the abrasions on her back and the self-inflicted nape wound where the bar-code used to be. Some of the minor wounds on her arms and face had already healed, so Mu'en used less bandages this time.

After putting her clothes back on, Mu'en carefully climbed into bed and lay on her side, curling up and hugging the brass box tightly in

her arms.

Boss instructed me to safeguard it properly.

Mu'en glanced at the formless sealing sigils on the box.

There had been some luck involved for her to have opened the box. She had already learned about the majority of sigils that were present on the box, so understanding them wasn't difficult. However, they had been linked in a way in which Mu'en hadn't yet learned.

Therefore, she had been telling the truth when she said 'just wanted to try.'

However, the artificial human's recently overloaded brain had the habit of allowing her to understand things beyond the surface when it was in a state of overclocking.

Via a deep layer of aetheric flow, she was able to locate the core of the sealing sigil and opened the box in a single stroke.

Now, Mu'en decided to put into practice everything she had learned to try and discover the method of the sealing sigils.

In reality, this was equivalent to trying to derive a mass-energy equation after getting a grasp of all the basic formulas.

It took a few tries for Mu'en to understand it. Although the current situation was many times simpler now, it would still be impossible to master in such a short span of time.

Mu'en huddled in the bed corner, her brain starting to crash. Her thoughts were all jumbled up because she had tried to comprehend something advanced.

In her muddled state, Mu'en looked up to see the hanging feathers of the dream-catcher in the corner of her field of vision... *How sleepy....*

She closed her eyes. Within the brass box in her arms, the holy emblem glowed faintly, like moonlight.

Can artificial humans have dreams?

Mu'en now knew the answer —Yes.

She was standing on a stretch of calm water as far as her eyes could see. The night sky was reflected on it and ripples beneath her feet spread, scattering the stars reflected on the water.

The vast expanse of starry darkness met the stretch of water, almost indistinguishable from the other, giving Mu'en the illusion that she was walking along the night sky.

Mu'en calmly raised her head and walked forward.

There were only resplendent stars in the night sky, but no trace of the moon.

This was because the moon was in front of her.

Mu'en stopped and met the gaze of the woman standing on the surface of the water.

The woman had long black hair that flowed down like a waterfall. A black veil covered her face to her shoulders and she wore a black gown with a layered skirt. Black, laced gloves covered her fingers all the way up to her forearms.

She was like a mourner, and the only things that weren't gorgeous black were her ivory white and supple skin and her plump rosy lips.

Her eyes were deep, dark, and sad.

“Greetings, Anointed from thousands of years later. My name is Walpurgis, welcome to my dream realm.”

The woman gracefully lifted the hem of her skirt and introduced herself.

Chapter 118 Hell Is Empty, For

Chapter 118: Hell is Empty, For

Walpurgis?

Mu'en blinked, dazed and wary.

Evidently, the fundamental knowledge she got from ***Door Key: Knowledge*** didn't include information about the Primordial Witches.

These ancient legends and secrets didn't belong to the category of basic knowledge and most transcendent beings were also unaware.

Even someone with Ji Zhixiu's background was only aware of some bits and scraps.

Only someone like Doris who had been around for a long time and had a significant status would be able to understand these things and could make sure nothing would happen to her.

However, her family clan had been an Anointed of Walpurgis Night and firmly believed Lady Silver still existed in the dream realm and would protect them once she awakened.

Other transcendent beings had varying opinions towards these ancient myths, but they were mostly of unbelief.

After all, a long time had passed, and these ancient myths had become so fragmented that some of them were considered outright taboo and heretical.

For example, the Church of Pestilence denied the existence of the Primordial Witches and rejected such ideas as heresy.

The Church of the Dome worshiped the moon, but none of its doctrines were related to the Walpurgis Night, entirely separating the two concepts.

Those who believed also had to say they didn't.

Meanwhile, dear student Mu'en's mind was full of question marks hearing the vocabulary of 'Anointed' and Walpurgis, for she didn't have an inkling of what these words meant.

Walpurgis seemed to have foreseen this. She released her skirt, walking forward gently as water rippled beneath her, and spoke with a voice that sounded like a nightingale.

"Dear child, you do not know my name nor my history.

"I am Walpurgis, alternator of day and night, beckoner of dusk. The sun and moon are my eldest son and daughter, the stars and lake sing their praises to me.

"I bless all things that live under the alternation of day and night, and I make a covenant with all who possess magic:

All who call to the sun are loved by me.

All who swear to me will receive my sustenance.

All who are treasured by me remain safe from darkness and chaos."

She moved towards Mu'en as she recited these words melodiously. The young girl was wary and tried to shirk, but in the next moment, the woman in black vanished and the melodious voice reappeared from behind her.

Black gloved hands rested on Mu'en's shoulders. Walpurgis approached the young girl's back and saw the scar on her nape. Resuming her normal voice, she whispered softly, "I like children who want to be free."

"I'm not one of your people." Realizing she couldn't get rid of the other party, Mu'en turned. "What are you trying to do by dragging me into your dream?"

The young artificial girl, lacking in knowledge, wasn't aware that the words Walpurgis had spoken were more than enough to subvert all conventional notions regarding the Primordial Witches!

Walpurgis didn't just control the night; she had control over a much wider domain.

Day, night, and dusk. Her control over the alternation of these represented her authority over time.

Sun, moon, stars, and lake. These represented her subordinates, for her level far surpasses these things, and even controlled them.

And her range of believers weren't just night elves, but all living things as well as beings that possessed magical powers.

Compared to the Moon and the Wall of Fog, the Primordial Witch Walpurgis seemed much more like a true god.

Walpurgis paused, then chuckled. "It's you who entered my dream."

And that was why she assumed Mu'en was an Anointed, seeking her out to be protected, according to the covenant made thousand years ago, even though her present strength had severely diminished, and the world couldn't remember her name.

Mu'en was also stunned. Then, she recalled seeing the glimpse of the dream-catcher's feather before falling asleep and instantly understood... She was in a wandering dream that had been captured by the dream-catcher.

And the medium was probably the Church of the Dome's holy emblem she kept in the box.

Recalling the conversation between Lin Jie and Father Vicent, then connecting them to Walpurgis' words, Mu'en discovered some contradictions.

"Are you the Moon?" she asked.

Walpurgis rubbed her head as if she were a favorite pet and smiled. "I am not. But the moon is my sweet child, just like you."

Mu'en thought about it, then looked around. "It's not here."

"When the darkness engulfed everything, I buried it together with

the sun,” uttered Walpurgis as she gazed at the distant horizon.

“But the Church of the Dome believes in the moon, just that they dare not look straight at it,” replied Mu’en.

Walpurgis’ smile faded as she gazed firmly at Mu’en. “That is a false sham. The true moon wouldn’t fear the eyes of its believers.”

“Fear?”

“A false faith can drive one mad. It fears being exposed as a deceitful usurper and thus, makes people swear not to look at its true odious self. If I still had power, I wouldn’t let it continue with its foolish ways.

“Unfortunately... I can only exist within this dream now.”

Walpurgis suddenly looked towards Mu’en. “Perhaps you might be my chance.”

“Ah?” Mu’en blinked.

Walpurgis pinched the young girl’s cheeks. “My child, you have a soul as pure as water, like the most malleable of vessels... Are you willing to accept this dream? I’ll give you all my remaining strength and let you take my place as the master of this dream realm.”

Mu’en asked warily, “What do you want me to do?”

Walpurgis grinned. “Slay the false moon.”

Colin sat in his own seat for hours, late into the night and wee hours of the morning.

Even when the sunlight shone into the store, his limbs were cold and his body still trembled.

Last night, he had waited up quite some time, eventually opening the door for the returning priest, hoping to hear the good news of a successful exorcism.

For the entire evening, Colin hadn't heard the sound of fighting or screams from next door, nor did he see anything unusual, such as blood spattering on windows or a blinding white light to show the intensity of the fighting.

Upon seeing the returning priest's pale face, Colin knew that the situation had been dangerous indeed.

However, things were completely opposite of what he expected!

Instead of getting word that the situation was resolved, Colin received a "You are mistaken. The bookstore owner next door is an ordinary person who is kind, warmhearted, and loves to help others."

Even Father Vincent has been corrupted!

Hell is empty, for demons walk among us!

Colin's paranoia reached an extreme and it suddenly turned into rage.

Why do these people just refuse to believe him!

The boss of the audio-visual store opened his door and set his resolve to confront the demon next door.

He had to expose the bookstore owner's true self! Even if he were to die!

Chapter 119 Coin Of Destiny (1)

Chapter 119: Coin of Destiny (1)

The fuming Colin had just taken a step out of his store, eager to prove his courage when he hurriedly retreated back.

Of course, this wasn't because he was overcome by sudden fear.

Instead, he realized he had forgotten to bring along his demon exorcising gear. He wasn't about to charge foolishly to his death just like that.

Even if he were to die, he needed to first expose that demon's true self!

In just the span of two weeks, Colin had turned his neighbor from an 'honest man' into an 'evil spirit' before upgrading him to a 'demon.'

Colin's plump body jiggled as he rummaged through the cabinets.

"Where is it?

"Where's my holy water?

"I remember that there was still a little left..."

After Father Vincent had left, Colin was both angry and afraid. In his bid to vent, he had smashed almost everything but his beloved television, sparing nothing and turning this place into a 'trash heap.'

The holy water was buried somewhere within. Fortunately, Colin had been rather prudent and had used a sturdy glass bottle to store it. Otherwise, he would have to concoct another batch... or leak it off the floor to turn his body into a sacred exorcism tool.

"Ah! I found it!"

Colin raised the bottle in his hand. There was still a fifth of holy water remaining in the transparent glass bottle.

This boss of the audio-visual store had a staid personality. He would sprinkle holy water conscientiously in all corners of the store three times a day, and his holy water consumption was rather large.

With some hesitation, Colin muttered, "Will it be effective enough with just this much left... It should at least cause some bodily harm to this demon, right?"

Making his normally lazy mind think hard proved to be somewhat difficult.

At this moment, he suddenly realized a gleaming object near his feet.

Colin bent down and picked it up.

It was a thin coin, about the size of two fingernails.

He vaguely recalled having heard something that sounded like the chime of metal falling when he had once kicked his sofa in a fit of rage just now.

Perhaps, this coin had gotten stuck between the sofa and wall some time ago and had gotten loose and fallen into this trash heap from Colin's kick.

And now, it had rolled out from amongst all this junk while Colin was rummaging through frantically.

No matter how troubled he was, as a businessman, Colin could recognize that this coin wasn't one issued by the Central Bank of Norzin.

Normal Norzin coins were about a millimeter thick and had a tiny version of the city engraved on its face and denominations ranging from cents to dollars on the back.

On the other hand, the coin Colin now held was even thinner and extremely light. Its face depicted three simple, concentric circles,

with an upright spindle through its spindle, seemingly a tad ancient and mysterious.

“This coin seems somewhat familiar, like I’ve seen it somewhere before. How strange...” muttered Colin to himself as he studied the coin.

Soon, he remembered where he had seen it before.

This coin was an heirloom of his family...

When he was a boy, his father and former owner of the store, Colin Sr., was still alive. He would frequently show Colin the coin and tell him stories about it.

Colin’s memories from then were a blur now, except that he remembered it was some magical lucky coin from which his family made their fortune from.

But the young and playful Colin had misplaced the coin and was given a beating by Colin Sr.

However, at that time, their family business had already dwindled to just an audio-video store, and the coin was just a little symbolic proof of Colin’s family past heyday.

As for its magical good fortune...

If it really were effective, would Colin still be spending his days in this dump of an audio-visual store?!

“And having a demon for a neighbor!” He screamed in exasperation as his flashback came to an end.

With the coin in one hand and holy water in the other, Colin’s little fears were replaced with inner anger.

While the myths of this coin weren’t verified, Colin reckoned that they were mostly bogus.

However, it was still better than nothing! May the ancestors of the family bless this descendant!

“In any case, regardless of whether I go over today or not, that demon isn’t going to let me off.

“So why not end it once and for all!

“I’ve had enough of living in fear every single day!

“I’m not going to continue waiting for the day the demon next door feels like having flesh and attacks me!

“It can’t get any worse!”

Colin swore continuously, piling more rage to his anger.

Plucking up his courage, he once again walked out of his own store and ran straight next door. With holy water and lucky coin aloft, he kicked the bookstore’s door open.

In Colin’s imagination at this moment, he was like the mightiest warrior in the world.

Puffing out his chest, with his lines all figured out and shouting, “Demon, don’t you dare look down on mankind!!!”

However, the scene greeting him from behind the door wasn’t what he had envisaged.

There were quite a few customers in the bookstore right now, all of them seemed to be together. Approximately five to six people were standing in front of the counter, seemingly conversing with the owner.

As Colin had kicked the door ajar with a loud thud, the bookstore owner and this bunch of customers all turned over to look at once.

“Gakk?!” The heroic Colin froze up as he recognized the identities of this group who were wearing dark green coats with a giant tree symbol.

Norzin’s largest organization for commodity and goods trading — The Ash Chamber of Commerce.

A while back.

Edmund pushed his gold-rimmed glasses higher up his nose as he surveyed the dilapidated bookstore without a signboard.

He then turned around and instructed, "This is Mr. Lin's abode. Proceed with utmost care, and do not look at or touch anything without permission. Our task is to meet all of Mr. Lin's requests as best as we can and help with the identification documentation. That is also the wish of our mistress."

The five others that followed behind him were Cherry's subordinates from the Ash Chamber of Commerce. They answered uniformly, "Yes, Sir."

That's right, the leader of this team was the butler of Cherry's household and a trusted confidant just like the head maid, Bella.

He looked about fifty, with graying temples and a mustache above his lips. He wore a smart suit, topped off with white gloves, and looked very reliable.

Edmund was the first to enter the store.

The store had just opened for the day a short while ago. The bookstore owner sat behind the counter reading, while a young girl beside him fiddled with a brass box.

Hearing the noise, Lin Jie put his book down and noticed the design of their clothes.

"Ash Chamber of Commerce? I've been waiting for quite some time."

Edmund put an arm to his chest and bowed. "Greetings, I am Miss Cherry's butler, Edmund Charman, and I am at your service."

Chapter 120 Coin Of Destiny

(2)

Chapter 120: Coin of Destiny (2)

Lin Jie was very pleased with the efficiency shown by the Ash Chamber of Commerce. Of course, much of this was owed to the efforts of Cherry. It had only been a few days since the call, and she had sent her own butler over. That showed how much the young maiden remembered him. Mmm, a good kid indeed.

“Hello, Butler Edmund.” Lin Jie stood up, grabbed Mu’en and patted her shoulder. “This child needs a new identity. A legitimate and clean one.”

“Just calling me Edmund will do,” answered the butler. He bowed to Mu’en and said, “Your request has been conveyed to us by the Mistress. Your wish is our command.”

“Alright, enough playing.” Lin Jie got Mu’en to put down the box and cooperate with the procedures for a new identification.

“Oh...” Mu’en put the brass box down reluctantly, apparently engrossed in studying it.

The little brass box caught Edmund’s attention for a slight moment. There was definitely a complex set of sigils set by a white magician sealing the box, probably enclosing some sort of dangerous and otherworldly object.

The bookstore owner views it as a toy and even lets this young girl play with it...

In the next moment, he realized he had allowed his thoughts to wander and immediately retracted his gaze.

Don’t look around or touch anything!

The Mistress' warnings resounded in his mind. Indeed, nothing within the bookstore was as simple as it seemed! Although Edmund was shocked, he was too good a steward to let these feelings show, and thus regained his composure after just a slight pause.

Edmund got two of their party to step forward. One held equipment that seemed like a camera, while the other carried some strange and complicated device.

Identification in Azir was also in the form of an ID card, but what ordinary people didn't know was that there was a method to attach the true identity of transcendent beings to the Truth Union's Aetheric Network. Therefore, identification couldn't be forged by most.

However, the Ash Chamber of Commerce could do so because, at the time when printed identification was introduced, the Truth Union's Mechanical Department was still in its infancy. It had been the druids who contacted the dwarven craftsmen who manufactured their machines.

Unlike the large and powerful monopoly that was Rolle Resource Development, what the Ash Chamber of Commerce specialized in were investments and connections. Even those evil-loathing knights of Secret Rite Tower got most of their funding from the Ash Chamber of Commerce for their respective departments...

But even if they had that ability, the Ash Chamber of Commerce would not blatantly create false identification often and usually only did so in secret.

Unless someone of Cherry's caliber asked for it. From there on, it was a matter of collecting information about appearance and aetheric flow, then some minor tweaks before printing the card on the spot. As he watched them at work, Lin Jie couldn't help recalling his past self from three years ago.

However, Edmund interrupted his memory. "The Mistress is currently engaged in Chamber of Commerce business at the moment and isn't able to come in person at present. She specially prepared a present for you as thanks for your help back then. Hope

you like it.”

Just coming here is good enough, why bring a present... Lin Jie replied with a smile. “I’ll definitely like it since it’s from Cherry.”

The old butler smiled. “Thank you for your kindness. I’ll pass on your message and I believe the mistress would be delighted.”

He then got another attendant carefully holding a small black box to come forth. Edmund was equally as careful as well, picking up and placing it on the counter-top before slowly opening it.

“This is...” Lin Jie’s eyes fell on the box, and he reached out to move it nearer for closer inspection. “An antique coin?”

An ancient coin, about the size of two fingernails laid inside. Embossed on its face were three concentric circles and an upright spindle in the center.

Edmund nodded and explained, “This is an ancient coin from the First Era. We call it the ‘Coin of Misfortune’. Said to have been forged from one eye of the Goddess of Fate, it possesses immense magical power and a long history.”

This coin was worth a fortune. As a powerful sorcery tool coveted by countless magicians, it was supposed to be on sale at the next Ash Chamber of Commerce’s auction.

But, with authority as a vice-chairman of the Ash Chamber of Commerce, it was easy for Cherry to use it for her own personal gain.

This item was withdrawn with the reason that its ‘danger wasn’t completely removed’ and replaced with another item.

There were also two aspects to this coin. It could be used to cast powerful causality magic, but at the same time, could bring great misfortune to the user.

If the user was too weak, it could consume or even kill the user directly. Even touching the coin could bring about misfortune, and so, Edmund and the others handled it with utmost caution.

After all, when this coin was found, its owner at that time, a down-on-his-luck magician had already knocked over his own petrifying potion, fossilizing the lower half of his body, and had his throat slit by a nearby Iron-thorn grass after losing his balance and falling down.

His innocent disciple had also slipped in his shock and became fossilized along with his master.

“It sounds very interesting and research worthy. I’ve recently gained an interest in the history of Azir during the First and Second Era.”

Lin Jie picked up the coin and observed it with great interest, and didn’t forget to tell the old butler. “Thank Cherry for me.

“Such an antique is probably worth a great deal... Cough, cough. Its value isn’t important, mainly, it’s the long and rich cultural history that is.”

Edmund’s expression changed when he saw Lin Jie pick up the coin barehanded. However, after hearing Lin Jie’s coughs mid sentence, he quickly regained his composure.

After all, this was a powerful being respected by his own mistress, and he clearly didn’t seem bothered by the trivial misfortune the coin had. *See, he didn’t even think of it as a sorcery medium, but a tool for understanding ancient history.*

However, legend said that this Coin of Misfortune had to be combined with the Coin of Fortune for it to become the true and complete Coin of Destiny.

“As long as you like it,” said Edmund.

“Oh right,” Lin Jie said, “I would like to request your help for one other thing.”

“Feel free to do so.”

Lin Jie mentioned his thoughts on renovating the bedroom and second floor.

Naturally, Edmund indicated that it was a small matter and would help him with it right away. Having solved two of his issues, Lin Jie was in a good mood. While studying the coin in his hand, he suddenly looked up and asked, “The Goddess of Fate ought to have two eyes. Since there is a ‘Coin of Misfortune’, then wouldn’t there be a ‘Coin of Fortune’...”

Baam!

The door was suddenly kicked open at that moment, and a plump man with arms raised came rushing in.

“Gakk?!” Colin’s momentum was halted as he saw the bunch of personnel from the Ash Chamber of Commerce glaring at him.

He had the courage to face the demon, but not the Ash Chamber of Commerce. He still owed the Ash Chamber of Commerce \$10,000. *This demon is evil indeed! To actually control personnel from the Ash Chamber of Commerce! Fine, you win this time!*

Colin smiled dryly, hid the holy water behind his back and waved the coin in his hand, inched forward, then placed the coin on the counter-top.

His back was drenched in sweat as he forced himself to speak. “Uh, I-I want to thank you for helping me with the circuit breaker back then. Th-This is my family heirloom, and I’m giving it to you!”

Having finished, Colin immediately ran out, tumbling and crawling at once. Everyone in the store exchanged glances before their eyes turned to the counter. Then, Edmund’s eyes nearly popped out of his sockets. *This coin is exactly the same as the Coin of Misfortune in Lin Jie’s hand! Is this the other ‘Coin of Fortune’?!*

Chapter 121: This Might Just Be Fate

Chapter 121: This Might Just Be Fate

“The Goddess of Fate ought to have two eyes. Since there’s ‘Coin of Misfortune’, then wouldn’t there be a ‘Coin of Fortune’...”

Lin Jie’s words reverberated in Edmund’s mind. Before he had even finished speaking, the Coin of Fortune was delivered to his door. This definitely wasn’t a coincidence!

Ordinary beings might not believe in coincidence and chance, but the farther one got into the realm of transcendents, the more they would understand that there was a thread of cause and effect between everything that happens in the world.

Those of Supreme-rank could feel, see, and even manipulate the threads of cause and effect, which indirectly controlled the fates of others! This was also why Supreme-ranks were considered gods.

They had powers that went beyond logic, formless and trace-less, as well as being indescribable.

Take the God of Rain hatched from the Magic Ovum Mirror as an example. It could control thunder and lightning which was its own power. There was no need for incantations or sorcery mediums, just hitting the clouds with the hammer in its hands could bring forth these destructive forces of nature.

It picked out the causal threads relating to lightning and endowed itself with the concepts of rain, lightning, and electricity. The same goes for other Supreme-ranks, who were equally as incomprehensible to other transcendent beings. This was why they were considered unrivaled gods.

But one thing was certain: there were no coincidences in this

mysterious domain. Moreover, what lay before them now was the legend of the Coin of Destiny.

This was ironclad proof! Ever since the First Era till the present day, the times where the Coins of Fortune and Misfortune combined could be counted with the fingers in one hand. And each time, within a year, the two coins would part, either from the owner disappearing or experiencing ill fortune.

These two twin coins were of the same origins but were actually the two poles of a magnet. Each time the two coins gathered, they would immediately start repelling each other and causing some unpredictable consequences.

In fact, there weren't many people who would want to put the two together anymore. Just obtaining one on its own would already prove to be a very powerful sorcery tool.

However, the worst part was that these two coins looked exactly the same. Trying to distinguish the two apart without the previous owner present for verification would require trial and error...

All in all, Edmund was certain that it was the bookstore owner's power that made the Coin of Fortune appear before them instantly.

Regardless of whether he had foreseen them bringing the Coin of Misfortune as a gift, or if he had arranged for that person to hand over the Coin of Fortune, this was all the tip of the 'coincidence' iceberg and evidently displayed his strength.

With a surprised look, Lin Jie picked up the coin that Colin had left on the table. He compared it with the one in his hand and found it exactly the same.

Linking the dots from what Edmund had said earlier, his heart beat a little faster.

Is this the Coin of Fortune? What day is it? Cherry's men brought me a Coin of Misfortune and in the next moment, Colin comes with a Coin of Fortune as thanks! He briefly explained how he had helped Colin with his circuit breaker, while of course, omitting the part about

Blackie's help.

Faced with the ashen faces of this bunch, Lin Jie shook his head and chuckled, "Ha... Looks like I'm still very lucky. Even the Coin of Misfortune cannot seize away my luck.

"Destiny really works in mysterious ways and this might just be fate.

"Haa... I've always been a romanticist that believes in fate..."

Back when it was raining cats and dogs, specially preparing a cup of hot tea for a customer that might not even exist showed that Lin Jie was poisoned by romanticism and a bit of a hipster. And when Ji Zhixiu had entered the store, the degree of romanticism poisoning within him had deepened and he couldn't help feeling that life could be really interesting at times.

It was just unfortunate that at this moment, no one could understand his state of mind. *Fate my *ss! What grandiose acting...*

Such thoughts went through the minds of the party from the Ash Chamber of Commerce. *Who gives a family heirloom as thanks for helping to reset a circuit breaker?!*

There has to be a catch! This bookstore owner is just...

Out of curiosity, Lin Jie overlapped the two thin coins. The coins must have been made out of some special material, for they instantly stuck together firmly, turning into a whole coin with two sides. Lin Jie turned the coin over and over, exclaiming happily, "Seems like I've gotten the complete Coin of Destiny, Butler Edmund."

Yes, everyone had seen how the two coins reunited in a dramatic fashion.

"You are really lucky indeed," flattered Edmund. He was an experienced and slick steward, so flattering such great beings came naturally to him.

Lin Jie placed the joined coins into the box. At this moment, he

recalled that Colin seemed a little off from the way he had scrambled out miserably. Thus, he said, “Colin seems to have encountered some sort of trouble.”

Edmund took his eyes away from the now-upgraded Coin of Destiny and asked, “Do you want us to check on that gentleman?”

Even though Edmund guessed that the troubles faced by Mr. Colin were largely related to the bookstore owner, he still put forth this suggestion.

Either to deal with the aftermath or to silence him... When someone was willing to offer help, Lin Jie was naturally willing and thus instructed, “He mistakenly thought that I was an evil spirit some time ago. I guess he’s probably given me this family heirloom to make up for his guilt.

“I used to think that he was a lazy man, but it seems like he has a decent nature. Help him as best as you can.”

Edmund wiped the sweat on his forehead and nodded with a smile, but deep down, he thought to himself, ‘He’s definitely offended you, so you planned it so that he handed over the Coin of Fortune. Indeed, we cannot comprehend those of Supreme-rank. This bookstore owner probably just has fun toying with mortal beings.’

The old butler instructed two of the remaining three to head upstairs to do a survey for renovation and got the last to follow him next door. The neighbor’s door wasn’t shut properly. It appeared that the owner had suffered a great scare. Edmund politely knocked on the door as a notice, then stepped inside.

“Mr. Colin?”

“W-What...” A trembling and sobbing voice sounded. Colin’s plump body was hidden behind the sofa, revealing a jiggly butt that couldn’t stop shaking.

Edmund took a look at the information handed to him and said, “It seems like you still owe the Chamber of Commerce a sum of ten thousand dollars and the due date is approaching soon.”

Colin knew it!

This demon was surely out to toy with him! The demon didn't want to kill him and had an ulterior motive!

Colin's rage started to boil. He couldn't be afraid of this. He didn't even fear death, so why would he be afraid of this.

I, Colin, have guts!

He shot right up and exclaimed, "Do an estimation! How much are my shop and all these goods worth?"

Edmund couldn't keep up with this fellow's train of thoughts, but since Lin Jie had asked him to help, he would do so. The total value came up to be approximately thirty thousand dollars.

"Is it alright if I use my shop to pay the debt?"

"In a way, yes. Although the valuation is like this, it would surely be even lower when it comes to actual business transactions... Uh, are you having some troubles that require resolving?" Edmund had originally wanted to waive this debt. However, he never imagined Colin to have such strong integrity and insisted on paying it off himself. Looks like the bookstore owner has a good eye indeed.

"None at all! Totally no troubles!"

Colin felt refreshed as if suddenly relieved of all burdens. He roared with laughter like a crazed fellow. "I am finally free! Ha-ha-ha-ha... Now I can pack up, leave, and never return!"

And packed he did, for he had already sold most of his stuff. Thus, after sorting out some stuff, he walked straight out the door.

"What do we do now?" asked the subordinate.

Edmund thought for a moment and saw the light. *After taking away that fellow's Coin of Fortune, the bookstore owner must have foreseen this misfortune befalling this fellow which might affect the neighborhood. That's why he's gotten us to come over and scare this fellow away.* However, Edmund didn't know why, but when he looked at the

messy floor of the audio-visual store, he actually felt that perhaps the bookstore owner had wanted to 'takeover' the next door store's territory.

"What else can we do? Return back and tell Mr. Lin what happened," sighed the old butler.

After hearing the recount, Lin Jie learned that his neighbor was actually a decisive person, but he had been oblivious to it all this time. At this moment, Lin Jie suddenly realized that the unit next door had become vacant.

Edmund felt that he had gotten the message. He handed over the recently obtained title deed to Lin Jie. "If you require it, we can help renovate the unit next door. As per your instructions."

Chapter 122: Meeting Silver Again

Chapter 122: Meeting Silver Again

While Mu'en and the other members of the Ash Chamber of Commerce were busy, Lin Jie went next door and found out that his neighbor, Colin, had already abandoned the audio-visual store — which was now Lin Jie's.

It should be noted that Lin Jie wasn't a shut-in that never went out. He did go out, albeit seldom, for his daily groceries and research materials couldn't just appear out of thin air.

“... Did Colin ransack this place before leaving? But, he seemed to have sprayed the shop with perfume,” Lin Jie muttered to himself as he surveyed the mess inside the audio-visual store, stepping over junk littered all over to get a better look at the interior.

In a quiet street like this, business would probably be comparable to his own store and naturally, the shop wasn't very big.

The entire audio-visual store was slightly smaller than his own bookstore, with shelves in the center and on all four sides, resulting in a narrow and cramped space.

Given Colin's size, it would probably be difficult to walk between the shelves everyday.

“No wonder he likes to curl up on the sofa and watch TV,” muttered Lin Jie as he browsed through the assortment of discs, tapes, and magazines in the shop, forgetting that he was the same, always reading away at his spot behind the counter.

Colin's audio-visual store sold stuff that was not much different from similar stores back on Earth. There were discs with music and movies, including erotic thrillers and even... hardcore pornography. There were also many different entertainment magazines with

scantily-clad cover girls giving a hint to the contents within.

These stuff were all placed at the most prominent area whereas the more proper movies and music were hidden at the back, basically showing what sort of place this was.

Lin Jie rarely came into contact with such things, not because of disdain or avoidance. However, now, he was browsing everything on the shelves with interest.

In his eyes, these too were an aspect of culture and customs.

A complete civilization would definitely have both a high and lower stratum. The high of elegance and profundity, and the vulgar and shallow depths that transcended material desire.

Just like the sun and the moon, Yin and Yang, these two aspects are both complementary and inseparable.

In his research of folklore, he tended to look at things in a dialectical approach, rarely having comprehensive affirmation or denial. Therefore, his level of acceptance was rather narrow as well.

However, there were only so many things here and very quickly, Lin Jie saw the single sofa that Colin was always confined to as well as the television mounted on the wall.

Lin Jie listened to the news broadcasts from this TV every day.

He did a quick search and found the remote control on the sofa. It felt greasy to the touch and Lin Jie could visualize how it was 'wrapped up' in Colin's grasp day after day.

Lin Jie tested the remote, and the TV still worked as per normal. Then, he headed upstairs to look around.

What was strange upstairs was the discovery of lots of refined salt, gold leaves, and pearls on the table, along with some dried grass and a powder of undetermined use.

Lin Jie grabbed a handful for a quick whiff. "Smells just like the fragrance downstairs. Could Colin's hobby be making fragrances?"

“Looks can be deceiving indeed. Haa... I really don’t know my neighbor well enough. Colin might seem rough, but he’s actually a rather refined person.”

But Lin Jie still had another opinion seeing these much refined salt.

In Western contexts back on Earth, salt was used to ward away evil.

Therefore, Colin might have been using this recipe as a means to drive away Lin Jie whom he had mistaken for an evil spirit.

Normally, Lin Jie wouldn’t have made such an association, but King Candela within the great sword of his had given him food for thought, thus leading Lin Jie to have such an idea.

“In any case, Colin has already left, and the misunderstanding has been cleared so it doesn’t really matter.”

Lin Jie put the stuff back and returned downstairs. The remaining space was all Colin’s personal living area and there wasn’t much else to see.

Getting Edmund and the others to tidy the place up would be the end of it.

Lin Jie’s intention was to turn this place into a ‘book bar’ that was part of the bookstore.

Lin Jie’s original shop was completely filled with bookshelves and there were no seats besides the ones at the counter. Customers could only browse the shelves and it wasn’t comfortable to read while standing. Moreover, these were mostly unfamiliar books and customers would usually only rely on Lin Jie’s recommendations.

Lin Jie was already used to the layout there, so modifying this area to place books he had already read as well as some entertainment-related books and magazines for reading and borrowing seemed like a good idea.

He could even sell milk tea here and let Mu’en manage it, turning it into a partial library of sorts.

With each having its own advantages, this could perhaps lead to more customers.

Lin Jie returned back and informed Edmund of his plans. Mu'en's new identity was already made and the following task of those subordinates would be to renovate the bookstore's second floor and the adjacent shop.

It was three days later when the renovations were completed and the party from the Ash Chamber of Commerce bade Lin Jie farewell.

Edmund and the others could only reject Lin Jie's kindly sales pitch, for they had to return and report to Miss Cherry. Therefore, Lin Jie could only regretfully drop the idea.

He left Mu'en to watch the bookstore and went alone to the newly built book bar.

As his hands grazed over the new bookshelves, he asked probingly. "Blackie?"

Blackie's entrances were always a little strange.

This time, he was a 'folded' shadow by the corner, enveloped by the setting sun of dusk. The shadow grew longer, forming a new shape on the wall.

Glancing at Blackie on the wall, Lin Jie gave a slight smile. "Can I ask for a favor?"

Recommending his own works to the people of Azir previously had benefited Blackie. Moreover, Lin Jie had recently recommended his own *Emblems and Totems* to Doris' family clan and had sold her 30 books at one shot.

Asking Blackie for help to increase his book pool shouldn't be too tough a request.

After all, Blackie had voluntarily come out to help him when Lin Jie had recommended a copy of *Ceremonies & Customs* to Wilde back then.

Sure enough, before Lin Jie was even done speaking, Blackie ‘collapsed’ from the wall, turning into a shadow that shrouded all the bookstores.

And as Lin Jie had wished, all sorts of entertainment and leisure books, novels, and magazines appeared. Basically, there was everything.

The method to control the bookshelves was the same as the ones in his old bookstore, as his heart wishes.

“Wonderful! Thank you!” Lin Jie said as he looked all around. When he turned back, Blackie was already gone.

“He really doesn’t like to claim credit for his deeds,” muttered Lin Jie.

Lin Jie would return back to his own bookstore first and get Mu’en to familiarize herself with the new wing some other time.

The second floor had already been converted to have two bedrooms, a kitchen, a hall, a study, and a small exercise area.

Mu’en took the smaller bedroom.

Since things had gone swimmingly and he had regained ownership of his own bedroom, Lin Jie decided to celebrate by going to bed early.

As he lay in bed, Lin Jie took out the Coin of Destiny which he brought everywhere with him and flipped it once. Because it had two similar-looking sides, Lin Jie had pasted a red dot on the side of the coin which had previously been the Coin of Fortune.

“Looks like I will have a nice dream tonight,” sighed Lin Jie as he gazed at the red dot on the coin, turning the lights off and going to sleep.

But surprisingly, when he opened his eyes once more, a familiar whiteness greeted him.

A woman with snow-white hair and silver eyes smiled warmly at

him.

“Welcome back.”

Chapter 123: Swordsmanship And Aether

Chapter 123: Swordsmanship and Aether

A sloped field full of irises greeted Lin Jie. A giant tree stood tall nearby, its luxuriant canopy held up by vein-like branches seemed as if it was blocking out the sky.

Even though it had almost been a month, the dream which Lin Jie had still remained fresh in his memory.

At this moment, Silver, the ‘person in his dream’, was currently standing before him once again.

Just like they had agreed before—to meet again the next night.

Although this ‘next night’ seemed a little late, on further thought, Silver hadn’t specified ‘next’ and it didn’t matter that much after so many days.

However, the most critical issue now was that Lin Jie had really dreamed of the same scenario once more.

Having experienced the dream of Candela’s ghost, Lin Jie felt that something wasn’t right this time.

Lin Jie had read Freud’s book as well as other books and examples related to dreams. There had indeed been some explanations for this sort of phenomenon for serial dreams.

But dreaming of the exact same scenario and character twice in a row and both being lucid dreams was somewhat inexcusable...

On top of that, in retrospect, it seemed like his bodily changes had started after consuming the fruit from this tree during the previous dream.

This notion hadn’t come across Lin Jie’s mind before this, but upon

returning to this dream now, he was suddenly enlightened and drew a connection between the two.

If the fruit he had eaten was transforming him into a perfect human, then what exactly was Silver as well as this dream...

While continuing to ponder, Lin Jie smiled at Silver and greeted her.

“Hello again. How was the book I gave you?”

Previously, Lin Jie had given Silver a copy of *Grimm’s Fairy Tales* which he had produced in the dream by ‘imagining it’, hoping that Silver wouldn’t be so lonely and would be able to pass time by reading.

Back then, it was all Lin Jie’s inner romanticism at work. After all, the other party was a mere fictional character in his dream and he wouldn’t have to bother about her.

But now that something about this whole scenario seemed off, Lin Jie felt that Silver might have probably read it.

At the same time, he discovered that the sacred sword extricated from Candela’s body was in his hand right now.

Bright and dazzling like a brilliant white flame, the cross-shape hilt embedded with exquisite crystals appeared just like a gorgeous work of art.

Having heard his question, a gentle smile appeared on Silver’s face. “It’s a very interesting book. A world I’ve never seen before, both romantic and beautiful where humans and monsters can live in harmony, and a clear distinction between good and evil...”

“I really enjoyed your gift. For the first time, it made me feel like I had someone by my side.”

She turned around, slightly raising her white gauze skirt and started strolling towards the giant tree.

Then, she turned around and asked, “Do you long for a world like

that too?”

Lin Jie wanted to reply, but once again felt that something was wrong. Upon further thought, he realized the sword in his hand left him at a loss.

After all, he was just chatting with someone else, and holding a sword as if he wanted to slash at her didn't seem too friendly.

Squelch!

He casually planted the sword's blade into the ground full of irises, then replied with a nod, "Who wouldn't want a world like that? But in reality, it is truly impossible. Humans are weak yet have the wisest minds and most vicious hearts. Monsters... let's call them monsters for now. They possess great strength yet can't be described as good or bad as the book depicts, nor do they help people unconditionally. In truth, they're hopelessly stupid."

Silver looked towards Lin Jie and smiled. "You seem pessimistic. Previously, when you advised me to be happier, I had assumed that you were a romantic with a positive and optimistic character."

Lin Jie chuckled and shook his head. "I do consider myself a romantic most of the time, but it also depends on the circumstances. I choose to believe there is true goodness in human nature, yet I frequently advise people to judge others with the worst case scenario in mind."

"Indeed, these two don't seem contradictory in humans." Silver no longer remained on this topic as her eyes wandered slightly. "That sword seems familiar."

Lin Jie glanced at the sword in the ground, gave a brief explanation of its origin. "I also don't know how it followed me... Um, through dreams."

Silver chuckled. "Candela has already sworn his own spirit, to become your sword and your steed. Which means that he will follow you always, no matter in reality or dream."

Lin Jie had a vague suspicion that Silver seemed to know about

Candela and the Alfords Kingdom. Thus, after a slight hesitation, he probed, “Do you know him?”

“Of course I do.” Silver nodded. She strode over to grip the sword, pulling it out and examining it. “The last king of Alfords, people call him the ‘mad king’ and ‘source of the great pestilence’. He used to pray to me.

“But in reality, just as he said, there was no plague, nor madness. Alfords was completely destroyed by Candela, and humans just confused this part of history with another.”

Silver herself was an elegant, matured beauty, always carrying a gentle and lonely smile just like a noble lady of medieval times. However, when she held the long sword, there was no disharmony at all, her silver eyes as sharp as the blade of the sword.

Pray... Lin Jie’s mind flashed back to the collapsed ruins of that great white hall as well as the tradition of worshipping ‘god’ in Alfords.

Could Silver be that ‘god’ that the kingdom of Alfords believed in originally?

A number of incredible ideas swirled through his mind, but all Lin Jie asked was, “Confused history?”

Silver flipped the sword upside down, placing the hilt in Lin Jie’s hands. She then walked over to his side, fingers brushing against his.

Instead of replying to his question, she gave a smile and said, “Candela gave you his memory, but you can’t see all of it. Only the swordsmanship is intact, am I right?”

Being in such close contact revealed the discrepancy in height between the two.

“Yes, it’s like a memory I had from the beginning, but I haven’t tried it out yet.”

Lin Jie kept his gaze straight, his line of sight approximately at

Silver's chest level.

Silver inched closer, holding Lin Jie's hand and raising it up, pointing the sharp and gleaming blade forward.

"Let's have another exchange. I'll teach you swordsmanship and when you have mastered it, I will tell you what they were confused about," Silver said with twinkling eyes.

Lin Jie was a little lost for words. "...Sure."

He was extremely curious with regards to the history of transition between the Second and Third Era as well as the memories and abilities Candela had entrusted to him. Lin Jie longed, more than anything, to be able to have a chance to delve into it cleanly.

Moreover, this exchange was completely to Lin Jie's advantage and he felt he had no reason to refuse.

However, Silver's first question in her teachings surprised Lin Jie.

She asked, "Do you know about aether?"

At the same time, the 'Truth-seeker' faction from the Truth Union had started their operation.

Chapter 124: Lawless Fanatical Truth-Seekers

Chapter 124: Lawless Fanatical ‘Truth-seekers’

Langdon Hood was an absolutely faithful ‘Truth-seeker’.

He was a part of the Truth Union’s Mechanical Department and a Pandemonium-rank scholar who was a subordinate of Rowell Feige. Hood was well distinguished in the field of firearms and was also a lover of heavy firepower.

As a reminder, the Head of Mechanics Feige and Head of Alchemy Rowell, were the old pals passing sarcastic remarks about each other in Andrew’s office previously.

Feige’s close relationship was met with a lot of questioning and alienation from many scholars after Andrew was impeached and put on surveillance.

Moreover, the attack on Machine Loop indicated a severe dereliction of duty on Feige’s part. If it hadn’t been for the other Vice-Chairman’s determination to seize control and pin all responsibility onto Andrew, Feige might have already been kicked to the bottom.

Of course, the main reason was that the ‘Clay Idol’ Project exhausted a great deal of manpower, material, and financial resources, and its best results had been stolen away.

All the remaining specimens and even related laboratories and storehouses were basically destroyed and the losses were immense, leading to a furious sentiment throughout.

In the entire Truth Union, there had been many that opposed the ‘Clay Idol’ Project from the beginning. Now that dissension was rife, the ‘Clay Idol’ Project was canceled to cut losses and the funding

was channeled towards developing more practical exoskeleton suits.

In short, this attack had worsened the already awkward and strife-laden situation within the Mechanical Department. Feige was even more disconsolate than ever. He buried himself in isolated research and did not care about anything for some time.

Feige's subordinates suffered too. With no funding and no projects, they were completely idle till the new project took over them.

In this sort of situation, the information concerning the bookstore that Andrew had divulged to the 'Truth-seekers' suddenly became the primary objective of these scholars.

In reality, even if Andrew's order hadn't been overrode, they too would still have wanted to go to the bookstore either way.

For these 'Truth-seekers', there was nothing more fascinating than knowledge.

And if there were such a thing, it would only be even more knowledge!

They were like fanatical zealots of a religion, relentless in their pursuit for knowledge and weren't afraid to use any sorts of means to gain, seize, or steal knowledge.

Some people in conflict with the 'Truth-seekers' termed them 'soul suckers' to express their contempt for the morals of this group.

However, the 'Knowledge-preachers' nor Secret Rite Tower had any way of imposing sanctions on them as what they pillaged was merely knowledge and not the lives, wills or souls that would cause harm.

And the victim's stolen knowledge wasn't irretrievable, it just needed to be relearned.

It could be said that this was a group of lawless fanatics that threaded a fine line on the boundary in which transcendent beings weren't allowed to do anything to ordinary folk.

After all, if the ‘Truth-seekers’ actions were considered a breach of regulations, then the actions of erasing the memories of ordinary folk would be even more serious.

In the Truth Union, the numbers of ‘Truth-seekers’ were roughly one in twenty, whereas the ‘Knowledge-preachers’ faction that wished for the widespread dissemination of knowledge numbered at one in a hundred.

Thus, ‘Truth-seekers’ were a large portion of the Truth Union’s scholars that couldn’t be underestimated.

These people weren’t fools and it would be unwise to see them as normal. Some of these knowledge fanatics were so obsessed with learning that they couldn’t function properly most of the time.

On the contrary, they were ambitious, perverse, reckless, and sometimes indifferent towards human life.

They were truly a bunch of ‘lunatics’.

By the time Andrew’s order was intercepted for the second time, a squad of ‘Truth-seekers’ led by Hood were already on 23rd Avenue.

They had cautiously chosen to observe first.

In the information provided by Andrew, the bookstore owner’s prowess was still uncertain. Therefore, Hood was extremely curious and thus observed for a longer time.

In fact, after watching for about a week and a half, Hood felt that the bookstore owner didn’t seem to act like how a truly powerful being was supposed to be.

Putting aside everything else, having the Ash Chamber of Commerce to do renovations was just overkill. Totally unlike a powerful being!

It was one thing to be lazy, but wouldn’t such a task be merely a trifle for a high-level powerhouse?

Going through this entire process was surely much more

troublesome.

To say that the bookstore owner found it amusing and entertaining was probably the only explanation though it wasn't a strong one.

However, there seemed to be a contradiction with the mysterious bookstore owner's persona of one who liked recommending books to others because the party from the Ash Chamber of Commerce didn't bring any books away despite them coming and going multiple times.

After observing for some time, few of the 'Truth-seekers' eventually verified that this group from the Ash Chamber of Commerce had been specially here to do renovations.

This was very strange indeed.

A bold guess started to form in the minds of some of these 'lunatics' — Perhaps this bookstore owner, feared by many, and said to be the one behind the summoning of the ancient elven king, actually had no power.

Powerless didn't necessarily mean he was an ordinary being.

But perhaps, he might have lost or had his power limited for some reason.

This discovery excited the bunch of 'lunatics' and they looked forward to the operation with great anticipation. After some rounds of discussion, they decided to take action tonight by infiltrating the bookstore and probing into the knowledge of the bookstore as well as its owner.

Another thing of concern was the bookstore owner's assistant.

As a subordinate of Feige, Hood had been involved with the 'Clay Idol' Project before.

While his area of expertise wasn't in the study of creation, Hood had worked in the laboratory for a short while when the 'Clay Idol' Project was shorthanded.

He had an inkling of those artificial humans from back in the lab. And even more coincidentally, he seemed to have seen this assistant before.

Hood was almost convinced that the scar on this assistant's nape must have been a result of removing the bar-code.

At night.

'Truth-seekers' from the Truth Union pried open the door of the bookstore. Like a bunch of robbers, they were here to pillage the most valuable thing—knowledge.

"You bunch stay downstairs and check the books. Retreat immediately the moment you realize something amiss. Got it?"

Having finished giving out instructions, Hood raised his gun and slowly made his way up via the stairs.

The lightweight exoskeleton armor didn't make any sound and the cloaking function didn't just hide him but also covered all traces, making him as stealthy as a cat.

Hood's own conjectures were even more reinforced by the fact that the bookstore owner hadn't even set up any basic defensive spells.

Moving ever so carefully, Hood finally came to Lin Jie's bedroom.

Chapter 125: Burglary?

Chapter 125: Burglary?

Lin Jie's eyes followed the dazzling and brilliant sword blade up to its tip.

Ash-like snow landing gently on the sword melted rapidly.

Aether?

Naturally, as a folklore researcher that was frequently exposed to occult beliefs, Lin Jie had heard of such a concept before.

Aether, ether, or akasha.

These all referred to space or sky, the first basic element in the creation of all material, and the fifth element alongside earth, air, water, and fire which existed in all things in the material world.

This, of course, was the more mysterious explanation of it.

In Ancient Greece, aether was a kind of matter thought up by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, an imaginary material concept that ancient physicists used to aid them when pondering over certain physics phenomena.

Later on, scientists came up with a variety of explanations about aether, but with the development of science, the theory of aether was gradually dismissed.

Lin Jie didn't have a great understanding of all these as he didn't have too much interest in physics and merely read such stuff just for the sake of reading.

Under these circumstances, Silver's slightly cryptic question was likely philosophical.

But, it probably was a literal one.

Lin Jie thought for a bit, then replied, “Is this dream... aether?”

Aether was the fifth element, and at the same time, one of the four basic elements of creation, omnipresent and a fundamental of all things.

Perspectively speaking, the place he was at right now wasn't a dream of his, but a very real space that existed beyond the material world.

And space... Isn't it aether?

This made Lin Jie come up with a conjecture.

Could it be that in Azir, aether isn't purely a philosophical concept but a true existing form of energy, or 'a stream of consciousness'?

Wait a minute. Azir!

Lin Jie was momentarily stunned. The name of this land was Azir, but it was only a transliteration of Chinese characters.

Its actual pronunciation was Azure, meaning sky blue or the heavens. Which represented the aether!

This was no coincidence!

As Lin Jie pondered, a question that had never bothered him before popped up in his mind—Why had Blackie transmigrated him to this world?

Deep down he knew that no one could give him the answer.

Silver was slightly surprised and replied with a smile, “It seems like you have quite a clear understanding.”

“Uhhh...” Lin Jie decided to speak the truth and answered tactfully, “Actually, I'm not especially clear...”

“Let's go on to the next step,” said Silver gleefully.

I'm really not clear! Lin Jie wailed in silence, frustrated at his own

vague answer. However, pressing for more answers wasn't appropriate now.

Silver noticed the slight tremble in his lips and toned down her slightly crafty smile. She continued on with a hint of seriousness, "The reason you are not very clear about much else besides some swordsmanship isn't because Candela's memory is vague. Rather, your current knowledge isn't sufficient to understand all this so it is automatically blocked off so as to not cause you confusion."

What a capable memory indeed... Lin Jie didn't know whether to laugh or cry. This was the first time he heard of an automatic filter to screen out disharmonious content.

Silver chuckled and gazed deeply in his eye. "Most people don't have this sort of ability, knowledge, and memory. Such things are closely related to consciousness, flowing from a higher order to lower, just like a flood. If the dam isn't sturdy enough, it will be swept away easily."

Lin Jie's guess was Blackie. He didn't have such ability by himself.

Silence ensued for a moment before he replied with some difficulty, "So if I want to obtain the complete memory, I would first need to understand what this memory is about?"

Wasn't this akin to the chicken and egg question? A literal endless loop.

Silver shook her head. "All you need is a key..."

While saying that, she held Lin Jie's hand holding the sword and raised it. "Close your eyes and concentrate on the sword."

Actually, Lin Jie already guessed that what Silver was trying to teach him would be the key—aether.

He had no way to understand Candela's memory, for he was just an ordinary man while Candela... It was apt to describe the difference between the two of them as heaven and earth.

The only way to connect the two was by letting Lin Jie understand

the only thing linking them—the sword, Candela’s soul within it, and his contract of loyalty with Lin Jie.

Lin Jie slowed his breathing and closed his eyes.

Everything went dark but he could still sense Silver shifting beside him, her slender palm resting on the back of his hand.

In this state, his attention was naturally attracted to the ice-cold sword hilt in his hand.

Strangely, even though he could only feel the hilt in his hand, Lin Jie was able to vaguely imagine the entire sword pointing straight ahead, as if it were an extension of his arm.

“Relax, sink your mind into the sword...” Silver’s gentle voice sounded as she released Lin Jie’s hand.

Lin Jie had still been wondering how to ‘sink his mind in’ when Silver released his hand in the next moment. He could clearly feel the shift in the sword’s center of gravity as it got heavier. That instantaneous sensation of it sinking instantly pulled his consciousness over.

She clearly did it on purpose!

Silver’s light laughter lingered in his ears. He had already ‘fallen down,’ just like stepping on air and falling into a deep and unseen bottomless vortex.

Rumble...

Magnificent sounds that were difficult to describe resounded all around, gradually replacing the soft rustling of leaves and iris flowers in the wind.

Like the wind, like a flood, the entire dream resonated simultaneously.

Swoosh! When Lin Jie returned to his senses and opened his eyes, the same snow and flowers were all around, as was the sword in his hand. However, now, everything before his eyes was filled with a

chaotic and cascading dark red tint.

His field of vision was the one Candela's spirit within the sword had.

"Is this... aether?"

"This is aether, but what you see is temporary. You need to first conceptualize a space to store them," Silver said with a smile.

Lin Jie nodded. "Just like how this dream is to you?"

Silver glanced at him and chuckled. "Just like this dream is to me."

"And then?"

"I'll teach you how to use it..."

Lin Jie spent what seemed like a long time in his dream working hard. He felt that if he were to really have a system, his swordsmanship skill would surely be gaining a lot of '+1 +1 +1's...' at a rapid pace.

As for aether, Lin Jie could only keep all of it here for the time being.

Eventually, when he opened his eyes for real, Lin Jie heard the doorknob of his bedroom being turned.

He snapped out from his hazy daze at once.

The door was being opened by someone!

Mu'en would surely knock when she came in, and now, Lin Jie was able to determine that this person was much taller. A man!

A burglary!

After the second floor renovations, Lin Jie's bedroom had gotten much smaller. There was only a gap of about 3 meters between the bed and the door.

Given the desperate circumstances, Lin Jie grabbed the sword by his

bedside and rolled in one swift motion, and stopped with the tip of his blade pointed precisely at the neck of the intruder.

This thief wasn't able to react in time and all color left his face a second later.

In the darkness, the glimmer of the sword illuminated half of Lin Jie's face. He squinted as he scrutinized the 'strange outfit' of this intruder. "You thief!"

Chapter 126: One Sword Stroke

Chapter 126: One Sword Stroke

“Stop, thief!”

Hood realized that extracting knowledge was a form of thievery as well. And before he could even react, his face paled. *Sh*t, he already knows our objective.*

They were exposed before their operation even began and the battle was over before it even started.

In actuality, Lin Jie’s consciousness was still in the dream and his body, still immersed in swordsmanship, had acted on instinct. Only when the blade was pressed against the intruder’s neck did he finally fully awaken. Of course, Lin Jie’s astonishment wasn’t shown on his face. The other party was a robber that had broken in and he couldn’t afford to be careless.

At the moment, Lin Jie had already taken the opportunity to take a proper look at this intruder.

Only now did he realize that the ‘strange attire’ were in fact black steel frames, similar to the mechas in movies, just that it was coarser and more gaudy.

All kinds of complicated patterns were engraved on the metal frame with faint flickering lights. It seemed non-mainstream... Not to say it was ugly, but Lin Jie was more used to seeing clean hard lines.

It was also a little difficult to give a comprehensive description of this contraption, and there was even some exposed wiring, making it seem as if it was a violent combination of magic and technology. And also very... chuunibyou-ish.

What person in the right mind would carve such haphazard patterns onto a mecha? Perhaps it is a self-made ‘indigenous mecha’? Lin Jie came up with a name for this grandly delusional outfit.

However, the outfit wasn't the main issue. Lin Jie's eyes noticed the gun in the intruder's hand.

This gun seemed even more menacing than that indigenous mecha.

It was also the reason why Lin Jie had determined that this was an armed robbery rather than simple theft. The intruder had brazenly broken in with a gun and even intended to enter the bedroom. He definitely had something malicious planned.

With this thought in mind, Lin Jie inched his sword forward, pressing it against the intruder's throat, as if ready to slit a hole in this person's trachea in the next moment.

He did it to make clear to the intruder that this sword pressed against his neck was no coincidence, and he could take his head at once if he chose to.

Of course, Lin Jie was merely defending himself. A kind person like him could never bring himself to do something so grievous as to hurt or kill others.

Only this sort of ruthless and delusional person, daring to break in with a gun, was one to be afraid of.

Lin Jie needed to take the high ground from the start.

Lin Jie continued to stare at him and said gruffly, "Your accomplices are downstairs, right?"

He had vaguely heard some activity and surmised that there was someone downstairs, but he hadn't heard the sound of Mu'en's bedroom door opening at all. Lin Jie had witnessed Mu'en's might sometimes. After her body injuries were more or less healed, she did housework effortlessly and could even hammer nails and dismantle furniture barehanded. Sure enough, the sound of Mu'en leaping off the floor was heard, followed by several screams.

The intruder's wide-eyed shock turned to panic and he opened his mouth to speak. However, the movement of his throat rubbed against the blade edge, drawing blood.

“Urgh...urgh urgh...” Hood made panicked sounds from his throat, trying to inform the bookstore owner that he couldn’t speak with the sword edge pressed against him.

“Put the gun down,” Lin Jie said.

Hood hesitated for a moment, then slowly moved the gun forward and crouched to lower it down.

However, this was only the first step.

The corners of Lin Jie’s lips curled up, and with a twist of his wrist, his sword cut down in a silver arc, slicing the gun barrel in two as if it were made of tofu.

The sword moved in full circle and returned back precisely against Hood’s throat in just an instant.

But this time, there was a gap of one centimeter.

Hood was dumbfounded.

His instinctive reflex of stepping forward was halted and his body turned rigid as he gazed at the cleanly cut gun.

Hood was fully confident in the equipment he wore. This gun was a contraband which he had personally made, using the finest materials from the Lower District. The frame of the gun was capable of surviving devastating force and its firepower at maximum settings was comparable to a small Aether Annihilation Cannon.

Of course, there wasn’t any safety or stability to speak of. This was all experimental technologies of the Mechanical Department’s new project, combining the white magician sigils with machinery. Poor control of it could cause the weapon to self-explode at any time and become useless.

Without official support, Hood could only bite the bullet and use his own money. And now, all his efforts and hard work were utterly destroyed by a single stroke of a sword.

Hood couldn’t describe the pain gnawing in his heart right now.

This was an early work of his, created with his knowledge and was an embodiment of all that he had learned. This sort of feeling was as if his own knowledge had been robbed away.

But fortunately, he still had his armor. That was the fruit of his wisdom and knowledge, his finest masterpiece...

“Go on.”

The owner of the bookstore with his cool, oppressive gaze beckoned for Hood to continue putting the gun to the ground. *You’ve already destroyed it! What more do you want?!*

This is torture!

Hood wailed inwardly as he laid the remaining half of his gun onto the ground with a trembling hand.

But he had just crouched down when he realized something amiss. Slight hissing and crackling sounded, just like... just like something was split open.

Hood turned pale, immediately realizing that it was the armored suit he was wearing!

No sooner had this thought crossed his mind, Hood noticed cracks appearing in the arm portion of his armor.

Like a cascading avalanche, the entire armored suit of his split apart and fragments rained to the floor.

...%# ¥ &!!

Hood watched this scene in utter despair. His face was completely ashen and every single imaginable curse word raced through his mind.

Only now did he understand that besides slicing his gun, that slash had disassembled his armor as well!

In a relaxed manner, Lin Jie now said, “Alright, you are able to move your body better now.”

He eyed the robber and realized the face behind the outfit was younger than he had imagined. This was just a youth of about eighteen.

At the moment, he had a face of abject despair, as if he had flunked his college entrance examination.

“Go down and stay together with your accomplices and wait for the police to arrive.

“You can do anything in your youth, but why break the law or engage in shady businesses?

“That is just wrong. All these things belong to others, and do you think stealing them will make them yours? You will never understand the process of hard work and effort people make to achieve all this.” Teacher Lin didn’t forget to give the intruder a lesson while bringing him downstairs.

However, this wasn’t a suitable time for doling out chicken soup so he stopped himself here.

He took out his communications device and made a call to Joseph’s disciple Claude, who just so happened to be a policeman.

Chapter 127: Stealing Books

Chapter 127: Stealing Books

Hood was firstly dumbfounded. Eventually, he managed to complain, “I-I didn’t do anything! You destroyed my masterpiece!”

Even if it was a robbery, I didn’t make any move at all....

This unreasonable claim was Hood’s incoherent attempt at defending himself.

Lin Jie turned and smiled. “What? Trying to explain yourself after breaking in? You were the one who trespassed and got caught! It wasn’t me who kidnapped and brought you inside, right?”

“Sounds to me like those things and your gun were self-made. That means you are rather talented. It’s a shame you took the wrong path and you ought to be taught a lesson.

“You should feel glad you haven’t done anything or it wouldn’t just be as simple as a lesson.”

Youths with disorderly and unrepentant conduct were the sort of people Lin Jie abhorred the most.

For some reason, Hood felt his body turning cold. And he stopped speaking when he recalled his completely destroyed armor.

The lights downstairs had already been switched on.

A bunch of fellows wearing ‘indigenous suits’ as well were lying in front of the bookcases. However, their suits were not as flashy as Hood’s and the metal alloy frames looked much better.

Lin Jie did a quick scan and saw six people. In addition to the one at the sword end, there were a total of seven.

Great, it really was a gang crime.

At this moment, they were all clutching their heads and rolling on the ground with some opened books scattered around them. They seemed to be in pain from the way they were moaning and groaning.

From the look of things, surely they weren't attempting to search the bookshelves because they couldn't find any money at the counter. Moreover, the one who had come up and was now being held at sword point was likely to be their leader.

Mu'en stood before this bunch, watching them silently. Hearing the sounds of Lin Jie coming down, she turned around with an innocent look on her face.

"Well done," praised Lin Jie.

Mu'en eyed the group of fallen intruders on the ground, then glanced at the smiling Lin Jie and blinked several times.

I haven't even done anything yet...

After hearing some activity downstairs and arriving at the scene, all Mu'en saw were this collapsed bunch with books in their hands, convulsing, screaming in terror and trying to crawl out.

Thus, using her quick wits, she ran to shut the main door that had been pried open to prevent these people from escaping.

Since the boss had praised her, she must have done the right thing.

Thus, the girl nodded earnestly. "What do we do next?"

Lin Jie glanced at his communications device that was still on dial. "Let's wait first. I've already made a call to the police. What's the situation with these people?"

Naturally, Mu'en was able to tell that these people were scholars of the Truth Union and they went straight for the bookshelves, meaning it was likely they were from the 'Truth-seekers' faction.

However, it could be said that they had shot themselves in the foot this time around, for Mu'en could sense the great horror oozing

from these books.

“They came to steal knowledge. Oh, but their lives shouldn’t be in any danger,” replied the young assistant.

“Steal knowledge... books, oh! You mean stealing books?” Lin Jie stared at this bunch in bewilderment.

Mu’en’s phrasing of the situation was strange, but Lin Jie was used to this young girl’s raw degree of understanding and thus interpreted the meaning on his own.

Hood’s eyes widened in shock when he heard what was said. With veins bulging out his forehead, he clenched his fists tightly and declared, “It’s extracting, not stealing! This is the creed of our ‘Truth-seeker’ faction. It’s a Truth Union matter. How can it be called...”

Pa! Lin Jie’s palm, together with the communications device, came slapping across the back of this fellow’s head. “What did you say?”

Hood: “...”

“Hold up.” Lin Jie’s eyes narrowed. “Truth Union?”

Beep.

Lin Jie’s call finally connected at this moment. He made a hush gesture at Mu’en, then put the communications device close to his ear to hear Claude’s respectful voice.

“Mr. Lin. What are your instructions?”

Sounding so alert even at such a late hour... Seems like it’s really difficult being a cop in Norzin.

However, Lin Jie reckoned that it was only Claude who was dedicated to work when recalling those three other suckers that had visited his store.

Eyeing Hood who was glaring prickly at his comrades, Lin Jie started to explain the situation to Claude.

“Hey, Claude. Sorry to bother you this late at night, but it would be more convenient since you are Joseph’s disciple.

“It’s like this. Just now, some people broke into my bookstore in the middle of the night.”

“What?!” A startled exclamation came from Claude’s end, followed by the faint sounds of explosions and screams in the background.

Claude seemed to move the communications device a little further away from himself as he barked out instructions. “Team Two up top, Team Three round the back. Where’s the medical team? Help the wounded first. Now!

“Those fucking bastards are going to die today! When I catch hold of them, I’m gonna put their socks in their—”

A confusing mash-up of voices and sound ensued.

Lin Jie’s lips twitched. It seemed like he had stumbled upon a police operation.

Norzin seems very calm though... But Claude got so worked up that such flowery language came flowing out. Haa, he’s definitely picked up this habit from Old Uncle Joseph.

A few moments later, Claude picked up the communications device again and took a deep breath. “Cough... Apologies, Mr. Lin. We’ve recently discovered new activity from ‘Blood Feast’ and tracked them down to one of their rendezvous points where we suffered an ambush. Currently, we are in pursuit of some of their members that are trying to escape.”

“Oh...”

Blood Feast?

Lin Jie frowned. He seemed to have heard this name before.

After some thought, Lin Jie recalled that it was Wilde who had mentioned this name before.

On Old Wilde's first visit to borrow books, he had mentioned, "Recently, I've received an invitation to join an organization called 'Blood Feast'."

Lin Jie had offhand asked what this was about, and Old Wilde's rough explanation was that it was a group of idle people who had nothing to do but have fun gatherings for entertainment and exchange ideas.

Lin Jie felt that this organization wasn't too reliable and sounded like there was a tendency towards multi-level marketing without a pure motive. Thus, Lin Jie had advised against it and Wilde had dropped the idea.

Lin Jie never expected to hear about this organization again.

And now, its nature was even more sinister. Lin Jie's original guess was that it was a multi-level marketing scheme, but from the looks of it, this was a whole terrorist organization!

Moreover, it was a terrorist organization that dared go against the Central Police Unit. From the sounds over the call, it appeared like the battle was really intense.

Fortunately, I advised Old Wilde against it. Otherwise, I would probably have one less loyal customer...

"But all of this isn't important," Claude continued. "What's the situation like on your end, Mr. Lin?"

Lin Jie returned back to his senses and replied, "There are seven intruders who broke in, calling themselves the Truth Union. I've already caught them. After some thought, I think that it would be better leaving them to you all."

"Truth Union? Don't tell me it's the 'Truth-seekers'?" Claude exclaimed.

Lin Jie had heard this name just moments ago. "Yes, it's the 'Truth-seekers'."

Claude was speechless. The situation his teacher had been trying to

stop had still happened. The bookstore owner and the Truth Union had crossed paths and now they could only hope that the Truth Union would be left unscathed.

“I understand. I am currently unable to leave my position at the moment. Can I come over in the daytime and help you with them?”

“Of course,” replied Lin Jie.

After exchanging a few more pleasantries, he ended the call, cast a sweeping glance over this bunch of thugs and his eyes finally landed on Hood, the only one who still seemed to be clear-headed.

“Well, we’ll just wait for the police to come pick you all up.

“In the meantime, I have a few questions to ask.”

Chapter 128: Try Extracting My Knowledge

Chapter 128: Try Extracting My Knowledge

Lin Jie got Mu'en to remove the 'indigenous mechas' of those men lying on the ground. After their face plates were removed, it could be seen that these intruders with tears streaming down their faces were all rather young.

As he had suspected, Hood, who had gone upstairs, was the leader of this bunch. The average age here was around twenty, so this could be considered a youthful gang.

However, that laughable motive of 'stealing books' slightly lowered the anger that Lin Jie had.

If these bunch were truly intending to break in and rob a house with guns, Lin Jie would have to teach them how to be proper human beings instead of tying them up right now and with the intention of chatting with them cordially.

Hood, who was being treated 'cordially,' turned his eyes away from the violently removed armor parts on the floor and looked at the sword edge before his own neck.

Scholars and magicians were similar in that they both relied on external forces to manipulate aether. Without specially training their bodies, their physical qualities would just be slightly stronger than an ordinary person, at most, with the physical strength of an Abnormal-rank.

In other words, they were merely lambs for the slaughter at this moment.

Moreover, when Hood finally got a closer look at the anguished suffering of his companions, he got himself a harsh realization. This hadn't been caused by an assault from the artificial human.

There weren't any physical injuries at all, and they wailed in an incomprehensible delirium along with vomiting while scratching themselves all over, as if they had gone crazy.

This... seemed like a failed attempt to plunder knowledge and their souls were suffering from the backlash.

Hood watched his companions in utmost trepidation, finding it difficult to understand what had happened. The chance of failure when plundering knowledge was very low and they each had only one book. So, how could it have gone wrong?

Aether was the currency of blood and soul, representing the two paths of aetheric development.

As scholars, specializing in soul, their spiritual quantity and strength far surpassed most magicians.

— There was a saying that a good scholar can definitely become a good magician, but a good magician doesn't necessarily make a good scholar.

In most circumstances, there were two reasons for a failure when it came to knowledge plundering.

First, the knowledge plundered contained things way beyond their understanding, such as forbidden, ancient, or high-level knowledge that was way beyond what their souls could bear.

In such cases, the consequences were more severe and could lead to the soul being traumatized or ripped up as well as causing unexpected effects on the body.

The second would be having too much knowledge exceeding the soul's storage threshold. Just like overeating, it could result in an overloaded mind, causing memory loss or expulsion at the same time.

If both reasons were present, then the result would be just like this bunch, crawling all over the place, having lost their minds.

That meant to say, in this store full of books, just trying to plunder

the knowledge of a single book was more than enough to temporarily turn one into a retard.

“Are you guys from the Truth Union?”

Lin Jie sat on the stool, occasionally pointing this sword at Hood’s neck.

One by one, the bunch of tied-up intruders stopped their screams and wailing, probably having regained a little sanity, and now lay on the ground with empty eyes, babbling gibberish. Only Hood remained seated on the ground.

Hood shrunk back in a shudder, the image of his weapon and armor destroyed in a single stroke still giving him trauma.

“Yes,” he finally replied.

The way Lin Jie looked at him was like he was seeing a student from a reputable school resorting to robbery. Although there was no direct relation between being well-learned and a person’s character, it was still strange.

Choosing to walk this sort of wayward path when there’s a straight path paved out was just sad.

Hood was all too familiar with this sort of look. Other members of the Truth Union would look at ‘Truth-seekers’ with these sort of eyes.

Deep down, he naturally felt anger, discontent, and unwillingness to accept this.

However, when he recalled Lin Jie’s warning, he chose to obediently keep his mouth shut.

But this wasn’t because he was afraid.

If ‘Truth-seekers’ knew fear, they wouldn’t have been called lunatics.

And lunatics didn’t mean they were fools, for a wise man knows

how to submit to circumstances.

Hood knew this saying well, and he would just endure.

Lin Jie continued with his questioning. "Pritt Hall and Trollope Rupert. Have you heard the name of these two researchers?"

Hood was stunned. He didn't know what the bookstore was up to.

However, he calmed himself down before answering, "Pritt Hall was a former Head of the Medicine Department. Rupert was the last Head of Archaeology, but he has been dead for more than a hundred years.

"The entire Archaeology department was a mess after he died and nobody was willing to lead it. Therefore, the entire department was abolished by the former director of the Truth Union."

To think that the two researchers of that fragmented document are actually scholars with the ranks of department heads, but even they aren't able to borrow that book *Rise and Fall of Alford's*.

Looks like this book is of a really high level... I've to go about this with a long-term view...

However, there seems to be some problem with Rupert's death. Even if he died of natural causes, there isn't any reason why no one would be willing to lead all of a sudden, or even the abolition of a discipline.

Hmm, perhaps there isn't any relation between the two, but if that was so, the last sentence is kinda superfluous.

There's definitely something regarding this.

Lin Jie realized that Hood seemed to have a special desire to show off his own knowledge. There had been an expression of natural complacency when he was talking about the latter part.

"How did Rupert die?" Lin Jie asked abruptly.

Hood realized his slip of the tongue and shut up.

"I can still ask them if you don't want to tell me," chuckled Lin Jie as he pointed to Hood's comrades on the ground.

Hood scoffed. "They don't know."

Lin Jie rubbed his chin. "You seem to know a lot."

"Of course." Hood sneered. "Us Truth-seekers are the genuine way to the truth. Our efficiency of learning is way more efficient than theirs. As long as we seize all the knowledge required, we will eventually see the truth!"

Lin Jie ignored him. "Since you can't say anything, it's likely that this matter cannot be disclosed to the public.

"The premise of stealing knowledge is probably from someone or resources, right? I wonder who can provide you with all this classified information... From your unbridled behavior, it seems like you aren't afraid of being held accountable."

Lin Jie took a long hard look at Hood and flashed a very amicable smile. "Young Hood, you don't seem like a big shot, so there's only one possibility. Your parents... have high positions in the Truth Union.

"Say, how about I use you to make a deal with the Truth Union?"

Of course, these words weren't meant to deceive. As an upright and kind bookstore owner, how could Lin Jie do something like holding someone for ransom?

Getting Claude, a policeman he knew to handle the matter, was really to increase the efficiency of resolving this matter and nothing more.

Hood's face stiffened. Eyeing the sword edge that was inching ever so closer to his neck, he shook his head vigorously.

"No?" Lin Jie sighed. "Alas, I was just kidding. You are a little kid who has no sense of humor."

Before Hood could relax, he heard Lin Jie continue on. "How about

this? Since you kept mentioning about Truth-seekers, extracting knowledge and what not, I shall not make a deal with the Truth Union any more. Instead, you and I will play a game.

“You try to extract my knowledge. I’ll let you off if you succeed. But if you fail, just take it as I’ve seized your knowledge and you tell me about Rupert’s death.”

Lin Jie’s smile widened. “How about that?”

Chapter 129: Third Eye

Chapter 129: Third Eye

With regards to this juvenile delinquent that had broken in, Lin Jie had been kind, tolerant, and magnanimous. However, punishment was still to be had, and disarming him had been the first step. Although this young friend was in the later stages of being a chuunibyou, Lin Jie was more than willing to go along with, then defeat Hood in his own area of expertise and break him. Teacher Lin knew how serious self-centeredness could be for people like this who were stuck in their own inner world. It would be impossible for such a person to come around, just by listening to Lin Jie's preaching. Therefore, since he wanted to extract knowledge, Lin Jie would let him try. Telling Hood that there was no such thing was letting him off lightly, so it would be best for him to experience it himself.

With a grin, Lin Jie raised a finger and tapped on his own temple as if trying to say, 'the knowledge is here, do as you please.' *Do I have the choice to say no ?* thought Hood to himself. The bookstore owner's smile was sinister and condescending, as if he was a cat toying with a caught mouse in its paws. And the finger-to-temple gesture seemed to indicate that Hood would meet his fate by the sword if he didn't obey. *This is a pure unadorned threat!* Clearly, he didn't have a choice. Not choosing to play this 'game' would result in him being held as ransom to negotiate terms with the Truth Union. If Hood was just any ordinary scholar specializing in mechanics, he would rather die than submit and insist that the bookstore owner's actions were fruitless. Because such a scholar was easily replaceable and not indispensable. As if the Truth Union would disclose such confidential information for the life of an ordinary scholar!

Unfortunately, Lin Jie's conjecture was spot on.

Hood wasn't a big shot, but his parents were. Langdon Hood, 17, a Truth-seeker lunatic, mechanical department scholar. At the same

time, he was the nephew of Truth Union chairman Maria, son of her late elder sister. In other words, this fellow was actually a second generation. But because he had chosen to stand with the Truth-seekers and frequently created trouble, Maria appeared to keep a distance. However, she certainly cared for him greatly in private, if not, Hood wouldn't have developed such a character. At present, Maria was trying to break through to Supreme-rank and didn't bother with Truth Union affairs. But should the day come where she came out of seclusion and discovered her nephew had been held ransom, the Truth Union would be held responsible and many people would suffer.

Therefore, if Lin Jie were to really hold him as ransom, it was very likely that the Truth Union would negotiate. And regardless of the outcome, the Truth Union would be disgraced and Hood would be even more upset than those old fogies. Hood understood this much, so he had no choice but to ride the tiger. Hood felt like a butterfly caught in a spider's web, getting more and more entangled each time he struggled.

"I'll play!" Hood agreed through gritted teeth. Deep down, Hood felt he was being toyed with rather than it being a game.

Moments ago, he had clearly heard the bookstore owner make a call to Claude, the disciple of 'Indomitable Sacred Flame' Joseph.

Getting an acquaintance from Secret Rite Tower to deal with the matter showed that this fellow had even arranged for the follow-up and wasn't even going to give Hood any chance to turn the tables.

Lin Jie smiled, then drew his sword back. Eyeing the ropes around the youth's body, he deliberately asked. "Your so-called 'knowledge extraction' doesn't require the usage of hands, does it?"

"Of course not!" Hood growled through gritted teeth.

Who does this guy think he is! Taking deep breaths, Hood closed his eyes and entered a meditative state.

Most of the time, there was no need to enter a meditative state when extracting knowledge. Using 'Gnostic Touch' was usually

enough and it was the method used by the rest of Hood's party.

However, using such an ordinary method now was courting death. Even though Hood still couldn't guess what sort of power level the bookstore owner had, he had sensed a terrifying aura upon setting foot in the bedroom which gave him a premonition of death.

This had also been the reason why he had stood rooted to the spot, unable to even react before his armor was dismantled by Lin Jie.

It would be extremely difficult to succeed even if such a being was unguarded and voluntarily subjected himself to extraction.

My motive isn't to extract a lot of knowledge, but to just succeed in extraction. I'll just need to use all my strength, come into contact with the fringes, and extract just a tiny bit!

In this way, I can win the bet, remain safe, and don't end up like the others.

Hood comforted himself this way. After all, the objective from the start was to extract new knowledge. Now, the bookstore owner was giving him such an opportunity, so Hood had to make use of it properly and prepare adequately beforehand.

Huuu....

After meditating for a while and raising his state to peak condition, Hood tried his first extraction. Soon, he realized that something wasn't right with the other party's soul.

There's really no safeguards at all? Hood wondered in incredulity. He couldn't understand the completely unrestricted soul before him. It was just like that of an ordinary being.

Is this a trap? Could he have placed a 'Soul Spike,' or perhaps 'Mind Shock'...

Such thoughts came to his mind, but he couldn't stop and thus pressed on. In the midst of all his hesitations, he finally firmed his resolve to gather his own soul's intensity into an enhanced 'Gnostic Touch' and quickly came into contact with the boundary of fringes

of that soul.

Hood was pleased, and just as he was about to withdraw, a large number of horrible, grotesque images flooded his mind, causing his own understanding of everything he knew into question.

Indescribable things started to occupy every corner of his mind and soul! A squirming abyss, shrieking ocean, stars with eyes wide open? The sky, with its endless darkness and chaos engulfed him in an instant! *It's a trap! All this knowledge is a trap!!!*

No safeguards, nor is there a need for any. Every bit of knowledge is an irreversible poison to one's thinking!

“Urghh! I-I concede! I concede! I’m done playing!” Hood opened his eyes abruptly, shaking his head in horror.

He jerked back so hard that he fell to the ground. Squirming forward, he managed to wriggle free of the ropes, but what was more terrifying were the haunting shadows trying to devour him. After a few seconds, Hood quietened down.

“Uh, are you alright?” Lin Jie squatted down and poked the youth’s shoulder, slightly sympathetic. Sometimes, the hard truth was just this cruel. Hood lay on the ground wheezing and replied in a muffled voice. “I’m fine.”

Haa... quite energetic indeed. Lin Jie returned back to his chair and chuckled. “That’s good. Help yourself up.”

Hood pushed himself up from the ground and turned his head.

Mu’en who was standing nearby saw a wriggling gap appeared in the middle of the youth’s glabella before it opened abruptly, revealing a protruding eyeball beneath.

A third eye. Mu’en took a sharp step backwards as goosebumps stood up all over her skin.

Chapter 130: We No Longer Believe In Truth

Chapter 130: We No Longer Believe In Truth

The eye in the middle of Hood's forehead opened for a split moment, peering all around for a moment like a newborn, before closing again.

The slit then disappeared after, as if it was never there.

But Mu'en had clearly seen the intruder grow a third eye right after his failed attempt to extract Boss Lin's knowledge.

Only the heavens knew exactly what he had seen in the Boss' soul.

There were only two people involved in this invisible confrontation and it was Hood himself crying out his defeat. Nobody else would know whether there had been any extraction at all.

If he were successful in obtaining knowledge, then was this still the original Hood after having such an abnormal phenomenon occur to his body?

Anyone else in her position would have probably been scared witless by this scene.

However, Mu'en herself had been 'baptized' by a huge amount of knowledge before. Even though she knew the horrors of her boss more so than others, she no longer felt that surprised by this scene.

She turned away pretending that she hadn't seen anything. Her boss' desire for revenge was very strong indeed. Even though the other youth was many times weaker than herself, the boss had still toyed with him in such a nasty fashion.

Hood picked himself up, dusted himself off, then sat back obediently onto his original spot.

Lin Jie was pleased. His 'Chunnibyou Kung-fu' had been on the mark indeed.

Indeed, wanting a teenager suffering from 'Chunnibyou-ism' required striking from their perspective, making them deeply aware that their actions had no real meaning.

Only this way would it be a truly mind-blowing lesson.

Haa... Saved yet another wayward youth today.

"Do you understand now? What exactly is all this extracting knowledge and Truth-seeking nonsense?"

Having heard the 'Truth-seekers' term and joining the dots from Claude's seemingly troubled reply, Lin Jie knew that this was surely an especially mischievous and disruptive academic group that was difficult to deal with.

And seeing from the conduct of Hood and his friends, Lin Jie could tell that this bunch was deeply obsessed.

Hood had a look of reverence and determination as he looked Lin Jie in the eye. Clenching his fists tight, he exclaimed, "I understand! All I have seen and known was false! They have deceived me all along, twisting whatever I knew to be true! I was wrong, I was entirely wrong!"

A Chunnibyou could be completely cured when what he firmly believed in was utterly shattered.

The results were surprisingly good.

A gratified Lin Jie preached, "You can change for the better if you know your mistake. Remember, don't do such meaningless and illegal things in future. Breaking in and thievery is wrong. Even if you are stealing books, you are taking something that isn't yours. Do you understand?"

"You are still young, with a young and bright future ahead of you. Don't think about reaping without sowing and learn to savor the joy of pursuing knowledge."

“True satisfaction can be gained only when you obtain something through your own efforts.

“This is something you’ve never felt before.”

Hood nodded his head firmly. “You are right,” he mused. “The ideology of Truth-seekers is just building castles in the sky. The high it goes, the more unstable it is. I need to have a more solid foundation and find my own way.”

Lin Jie felt there was something he could impart to this youth. “Then go forge your own path. Being able to think this way means that you are a wise person.

“And Wisdom, is even more important than knowledge. You can create new things with knowledge. But with wisdom, you can create new knowledge!”

“Wisdom... create knowledge...” Hood repeated these words, his eyes lighting up by the minute. The way he gazed at Lin Jie now was almost fanatical.

Lin Jie eventually remembered the motive for his doling of chicken soup this time around.

He cleared his throat and said with a smile. “But you will need to take time to understand it. Let’s talk about Rupert first.”

Hood nodded without hesitation. “Rupert did not die of natural causes. It is rumored that he went mad after discovering a forbidden secret from studying the history of the transition between the Second and Third Era and killed himself.

“After his suicide, a number of archaeologist scholars tried digging into Rupert’s cause of death and ended up dying themselves. Afterwards, nobody dared touch the relevant resources, and they were extremely fearful of information pertaining to that period. Panic spread and there were rumors that the ‘Great Pestilence’ from thousands of years ago would return. In order to stop this panic, the archaeology department was abolished.”

A series of deaths pertaining to research material was strange

indeed. But there's also a possibility that information from that period subverted the understanding of these academics, which they found unacceptable.

Lin Jie pondered for a moment, then asked. "Are all the relevant resources sealed away?"

"Yes, they are. There's still one last complete copy of Period of Darkness: Rise and Fall of Alford's in the Truth Union. It is said that this book caused Rupert to go mad and therefore it is highly restricted."

Without any hesitation, Hood continued enthusiastically. "I can bring it to you if you want."

Lin Jie was a tad surprised. "You can get it?"

Hood nodded, his eyes glowing with delight. "Chairman Maria of the Truth Union is my aunt. She's currently in seclusion and gave me borrowing rights."

Well, I guessed that this fellow's parents had some status in the Truth Union, but I didn't expect this high of a level.

With such a massive pillar behind him, it's no wonder he dared to break in and steal.

Lin Jie didn't forget to remind him. "Only if it's within your ability. Do not go out of line."

"Got it." Hood grinned.

At this time, a few of the other intruders started to wake up with dazed faces and drooling mouths, similar to dementia patients.

Lin Jie got Mu'en to help untie them as they all got up unsteadily. Fortunately, they still recognized Hood, and after meeting his gaze, the others in the group collectively bowed in apology towards Lin Jie, promising to no longer steal knowledge and to not believe in the Truth-seekers.

When Claude arrived, he saw the Truth-seeker youths as docile as

lambs and at once understood that these fellows had asked for it and suffered.

As there was already a 'private settlement', Claude only asked a few token questions before letting them go.

After leading his group some distance away from the bookstore, he turned around to his gang. "You've all seen it for yourselves, right?"

The others had feverish looks on their faces and chimed in together.

"Yes!"

"The real truth is in the book!"

"That's right, how great it is!

"How beautiful!"

"I was shocked!"

"I feel so full inside and still want to do it again!"

"The books are gospels of wisdom, it's truly wonderful!"

With a huge grin showing all his pearly whites, Hood looked towards the group and spread his arms wide. "Well, from now on, we no longer believe in truth, alright?"

With infatuated expressions, the group shouted out in unison, "Yes!"

Hood went on. "So who do we believe in?"

The group of youth exchanged glances at each other and said gleefully, "Mr. Lin says that Wisdom creates new knowledge. We will believe in wisdom!"

Back in the bookstore, Claude hadn't left yet. After some hesitation, he asked Lin Jie, "Mr. Lin, have you heard from Wilde recently?"

Chapter 131: Blood Feast

Chapter 131: Blood Feast

“Wilde?” Lin Jie was just putting away the used ropes under the counter when he raised his head upon hearing those words.

“Has Joseph still not found the whereabouts of his old friend?”

He still remembered that the original reason Joseph first came to the bookstore was to reconcile with Wilde. Yet, it had already been a month, and perhaps his search hadn’t been very effective.

Wilde, an ‘empty nester’ had already experienced the crisis of ‘having an un-filial child trying to seize his assets.’ Of course, the possibility that Old Wil was hiding from Joseph couldn’t be eliminated either, considering the past arguments the two of them had in the past. Although Joseph had good intentions and made efforts to reconcile with Wilde, that didn’t necessarily mean Wilde felt the same.

“Uhm...yes.”

Beads of sweat broke out on Claude’s forehead. *Old friend my *ss! Teacher’s greatest desire is to rip out Wilde’s heart and lungs.*

“But it isn’t like we gained absolutely nothing either. We’ve found some clues... A while ago, he appeared near Fifty-Second Avenue and stayed for some time, at least for an entire day.”

Fifty-Second Avenue...

Lin Jie calculated the approximate location in his head and was startled by his realization. Wasn’t that the location of the second bombing accident that had occurred recently?

Although the incident in question had occurred a week ago, the media was still reporting and following up with the story.

Apparently, the accident over there was more serious than the

explosion caused by a gas leak on this street. It seemed that rioters took advantage of the heavy rain and used that opportunity to plant explosives in the sewage system. The series of explosions resulted in the collapse of the base foundations.

Coupled with the flooded streets, the central valve of the sewage went completely out of control and the continuous flooding eventually flattened several streets. In addition to that, rioters also attacked and raided the scientific research institutions in the Central District. Perhaps it was their rampage through the Central District that made the Central District Police Unit take action and launch a large-scale clean-up operation. It was also related as to why a police cordon had been raised in the area some days back. Yet during all of this, Wilde had stayed near Fifty-Second Avenue for a whole day. Most of the residents had already been evacuated, and more importantly, that area had been the most severely affected by the flooding.

Normal people would have no reason to stay around in that area, much less for such a long time. Lin Jie could tell from Claude's demeanor and tone that he was referring to the time, or perhaps, the entire day of when the previous bombing attack occurred. *Perhaps Old Wilde is connected to that attack!* Li Jie arrived at this conclusion after observing how Claude expressed himself.

Could Old Wil have been so traumatized by the Charles incident that he joined some sort of hateful organization?

"Unfortunately, he hasn't come to see me since the last time he returned his book." Lin Jie became uncomfortable at the thought that one of his old customers had chosen to go down the wrong path.

"Does it have to do with the events on Fifty-Second Avenue?" Li Jie asked. "There's no need to hide anything, you can just tell me."

"Yes." Claude heaved a sigh.

In truth, they had suspected that the bookstore's owner was inciting the recent happenings regarding White Wolf, but it seemed like that wasn't the case.

But who could say that was the case with Wilde?

Although they were all guests, from the supposed timeline, Wilde had come the first. The gift that Wilde had given was still displayed on the counter. Asking the bookstore's owner for help dealing with Wilde would highly likely fail. They could only hope that the bookstore owner would at least provide them with some small clues.

"Teacher has been attempting to track his whereabouts and we would like your help. We are willing to pay the price for it."

Secret Rite Tower had already gotten hold of the altar within the sewers and had launched a full-scale investigation in the past four weeks.

First, they had found the aetheric traces left by Wilde near the battlefield. Secondly, the evidence of blood sacrifices used by those hunters seemed to point at Wilde as well.

Joseph and Wilde had crossed paths multiple times throughout their history, hence his understanding towards Wilde's magic was close to perfection. This meant that if Joseph said that he detected Wilde's magic, then it was almost entirely accurate.

Lin Jie frowned. *If they're already using the term "track", then Old Wil has already become a suspect in the case. Just what had he done?*

"I'll do my best. However, since I'm agreeing to this, I think there are some things that need to be discussed first. Over the call just now, you said that 'Blood Feast' was on the move, right? Are you tracking them?"

Claude nodded. "Yes. This organization has existed for a long time, engaged in shady business. Because they've been established for so long, they have members scattered everywhere and records dating back several decades.

"We've been conducting our investigation without rest and recently found traces of their activity once again."

A pyramid scheme with a long history? Sounds evil indeed.

But if they had the power to make the Central Police Unit powerless for at least a decade or longer, then it must mean that they were an extremely powerful criminal organization. Moreover, the background noises during the call seemed like a fierce exchange had broken out. It seemed that this wasn't just a simple pyramid scheme that Lin Jie had assumed it to be, but an armed terrorist organization instead.

"Old Wilde had mentioned to me that 'Blood Feast' had invited him some time ago. At that time, I had stopped him... but I doubt he listened to me.

"Recently, he mentioned that there was a feast going on soon, so I assume this is what he meant," Lin Jie explained with a sigh.

Claude was taken aback for a moment before his eyes suddenly widened.

Destructive-rank black magician, "Faceless Black-scaled Man" Wilde was invited to join 'Blood Feast' in the past?! This is important information!

And "Blood Feast" sprang out shortly after Wilde reappeared after many years! Could it be that Wilde still joined the "Blood Feast" despite the advice from the bookstore's owner?

This evil organization has existed in Norzin for a very long time, with members for all the various factions. After a convene of members, an initiator would issue tasks and offer rewards which participants accomplished together, with a middle-man as witness and safeguards. Secret Rite Tower had suspected 'Blood Feast' to be the ones behind this recent incident.

They initially thought that Wilde would never join 'Blood Feast' given his character and status. If things had truly turned out this way, then 'Blood Feast' has surely summoned their members to action recently. Secret Rite Tower had to speed up their investigations!

"Thank you for your warnings." Claude stood up and saluted gratefully. He finally understood the bookstore owner's 'kindness';

Mr. Lin had even been willing to give a hint regarding such an important matter. *It's just...sigh, there weren't many like the bookstore owner in this world...* thought Claude to himself. Not only was the activities associated with the 'Blood Feast' bad enough, but several hunter organizations had gotten quite restless recently.

Of course, hunter organizations would be restless. The blood of dream beasts flowed through their veins. They were savage and violent by nature, always constantly prepared for any battle. Just the scent of one drop of blood was enough to incite them all to swarm. And now, the most tempting blood of them all had been placed on a picnic table — White Wolf's original blood formula. —Ji Zhixu had already led the fledgling hunter organization, Spider, to take over most of White Wolf's territory. In just three months, they had already experienced three large-scale battles and countless small skirmishes.

They never seemed to sleep, constantly fighting again and again, all while becoming stronger. But disadvantages were bound to appear sooner or later. Ji Zhixiu received news that other hunter organizations were already planning a fourth attack, and this would be the most important one. Win, and Spider stands firm. Lose, and everything including their lives would be forfeited.

Two weeks after Ji Zhixiu had last visited the bookstore, "Pale Night-watcher" Ackerman came to an old White Wolf hideout and officially became a member of the Spider hunter organization.

Chapter 132: Tonight, A Flower Joins The Hunt

Chapter 132: Tonight, A Flower Joins The Hunt

Ji Zhixiu had been looking forward to Ackerman's arrival for some time.

This hunter who hadn't yet gotten an official evaluation yet was already widely reputed to be beyond Destructive-rank would become Spider's strongest fighting force for now. Moreover, he would remain as one of Spider's top fighters for a very long period to come.

Ackerman taking on Wilde's bounty then forfeiting made many view him unfavorably. Some reckoned he didn't have the required strength and was only grandstanding.

However, with proper thought, it was easy to see that the Truth Union wouldn't have given such an important bounty mission to someone incapable of accomplishing it. Before Ackerman chose to forfeit, the Truth Union surely had the basis to think that Ackerman had the ability to complete the task.

Thus, it could be assumed that the Truth Union had spread this news widely as retaliation for Ackerman playing them out.

In this light, Ackerman was, without a doubt, a crazy madman that had the gall to provoke and defy the Truth Union.

But most importantly, Ackerman was introduced by the bookstore owner, and so, Ji Zhixiu trusted his strength unconditionally.

What the bookstore owner said was surely right.

By the time Ackerman arrived, Spider was already coped up inside the old White Wolf hideout, while hunters from other groups patrolled outside, besieging them.

Although these hunters were clearly far inferior to Ackerman, startling them with a large-scale attack wasn't a wise move.

However, this blockade didn't pose any difficulty for Ackerman, a master of disguise. Hiding his own aura and presence, he sneaked in and met Ji Zhixiu.

"Welcome to Spider." Ji Zhixiu's beautiful face showed an elegant smile as she gave a bow to this ordinary-looking hunter before her.

Similarly, Ackerman returned the Hunter salute, his knowing eyes of an elder taking measure of the young Spider leader before him.

She looked young but had an acute, steady gaze like a lone wolf hiding in the grass, patiently watching its prey. Such an unblinking stare would easily make anyone's hairs stand.

This was an excellent and battle-hardened hunter.

But what delighted and surprised him was that Ji Zhixiu's eyes were clear. There weren't any signs of sordid blood affecting her rationality.

Ackerman could also sense that the level of this young hunter was very close to the level he had been when he first broke through. That meant to say, Ji Zhixiu was already close to achieving Destructive-rank and just needed that one step.

This also meant that the concentration of sordid blood in her body was exceptionally high.

Strangely, there wasn't the slightest anomaly to her appearance and even her temperament seemed mild!

Trembling in excitement, Ackerman thought about the 'new way' that the bookstore owner had talked about. Turns out this was an actual new way, not just for him, but for other hunters as well.

No need to be tormented by sordid blood, and no longer a fate destined for madness.

Ji Zhixiu noticed the change in Ackerman's expression and

immediately understood what was going through his mind. "I'm guessing that you've already sensed it?"

Ackerman nodded, then took a deep breath. "Is this the power Mr. Lin gave you?"

"That's right," Ji Zhixiu replied with a steady gaze. "The power to control sordid blood."

Ackerman was suddenly unable to control his emotions and choked up. "Praise the bookstore owner. This will be a way to save all hunters... Oh god, my father, my mother, my teacher, my friends have all died because of sordid blood. I watched as their bones gradually twisted as hair and eyes sprouted all over their bodies. Yet I was helpless. That sort of despair is just devastating..."

He went on for some time before he realized his gaffe and quickly calmed himself down. With a wry smile, he pointed to his own head. "I'm affected as well. My emotions are amplified many times over and I have no way of controlling them. It makes me feel like I'm really insane."

Ji Zhixiu could understand what Ackerman felt. Before she received Blood and Beast, she too suffered the continuous torment of hallucinations.

"Everything will only get better. The bookstore owner will grant us hunters the gospel. Under his protection, we will receive a new life," Ji Zhixiu consoled Ackerman in an effort to build trust as well as share the strength and guidance she received from Lin Jie.

The two reached a consensus of sharing praises about the bookstore owner and immediately became good partners.

This went until the hunters surrounding Spider finally attacked under the cover of darkness.

Till now, there had only been three large hunter organizations in Norzin, including the former White Wolf. Now the only remaining two participated in this siege and attacked.

They came with such fervor that the outer defenses of the hideout

were immediately overwhelmed and broken.

Ackerman stood up preparing to give these impudent fellows a night to remember for daring to stand in the way of the bookstore owner's great gift.

However, Ji Zhixiu stopped him, revealing a sly smile. "Let them come in. I have a surprise installed for them."

Ackerman appeared puzzled, then saw Ji Zhixiu raising an arm. A thin vine stretched out, wrapping around her thin slender arm before rapidly blooming into a delicate red rose.

Ackerman froze, then gulped nervously as he pointed a shaky finger at the rose on her arm.

The horrifying ordeal experienced by Ackerman during his first visit to the bookstore still remained as an unforgettable psychological trauma in his heart.

He never imagined that the bookstore owner would actually give the Seed of Desire to Ji Zhixiu.

No wonder... It's no wonder that she's so confident. She has meticulously prepared it all. This whole siege is just a facade and the true trap is about to spring...

Ji Zhixiu gently stroked the swaying rose on her arm. Within the flower bud, eyeballs filled with avarice and blood-lust peeked out.

The roots of the rose were extended into the soil. In this one week, it had already spread throughout the entire hideout...

And in the darkness outside, a truly unforgettable nightmare for the besiegers had begun.

They fought triumphantly into the hideout as Spider's hunters retreated and fled. Just as the slaughter was about to begin, the ground started to shake.

At first, the invaders thought it was an earthquake, but soon huge, thick vines crept up all around, covering the walls and floor. Eyes

and limbs sprouted out from what seemed like decayed flesh on these wriggling vines, forming a horrifying sight.

These things were like a repulsive plant-and-human patchwork.

And before the invaders knew it, these vines had already crept up to them, grabbing their hands and feet, wrapping them lovingly and boring into every orifice of their bodies.

And if any of these attackers were still conscious, they would be able to see the looks of utter despair from their comrades as some unknown thing squirmed beneath their skin, contorting their bodies in unimaginable ways.

But up till this point, they would find themselves without any desires, only able to bear with the excruciating pain, screaming as they were ripped to pieces.

It was truly a hellish sight.

On her vantage point up high, Ji Zhixiu smiled as she watched the attackers get chewed up and killed in a prison of flesh and blood. These flesh and blood then formed a giant flower, opening up its petals to reveal fangs and a mouth, unleashing a growl of satiation—The Seed of Desire had consumed flesh and transformed into an absolutely terrifying monster.

Flesh plastered the walls and floor of the hideout, and the name ‘Nightmare Weaver’ was spread amongst hunters after the slaughter on this night.

Chapter 133: Your Reputation Or Your Life

Chapter 133: Your Reputation Or Your Life

The pioneer of this new path had gotten the help of the bookstore owner. And it eventually culminated in the triumph of the moment.

The entire old hideout was covered with a thick layer of minced flesh. The concentrated smell of blood seemed all too real and the faint reddish mist decreased visibility.

Ji Zhixiu's eyes narrowed and she took a deep breath.

The formless 'Steel Resolve' like an invisible floating octopus writhed behind her back, stretching its tentacles and collecting souls of the dead.

Although these souls had been damaged because of the Seed of Desire, they still made excellent 'offerings' as they belonged to transcendent beings.

She planned to sacrifice these souls to the stone gargoyle in the bookstore.

Since Ji Zhixiu didn't have anything to repay the bookstore owner for helping her so much, then she could only feed the gargoyle in secret.

Mr. Lin's treatment of these 'pets' was harsh and he treated them entirely as ornaments.

This wasn't a conjecture that Ji Zhixiu came up with. Instead, this was what Little Flower—the name she had given the Seed of Desire—had told her as it was processing the devoured desires.

Now, the Seed of Desire's voraciousness was partially from its intrinsic nature, and partly due to having been starved.

Ji Zhixiu would often wonder whether this was one of the bookstore owner's ways of domestication. Letting these monsters starve for extended periods so that they would be especially ferocious when the time came for them to attack.

Ackerman stood beside her, similarly watching the whole hideout churning. Shrugging, he mused, "Looks like you don't need my help."

Ackerman now viewed Ji Zhixiu in a different light. Before, while the common connection between them was the bookstore, he still viewed Ji Zhixiu as a junior because of his strength and experience.

But now, Ji Zhixiu had completely put the invaders in their place, without any aid from Ackerman. This sort of competent leadership ability must have been greatly valued by the bookstore owner.

In his heart, Ackerman already considered Ji Zhixiu a peer.

Ji Zhixiu shook her head and said, "The episode here has ended, but there's an even more important matter that will require your help."

"Go ahead, Leader." Ackerman, changed his way of address and bowed. "I will oblige, for it is the way of the bookstore."

Ji Zhixiu smiled but didn't say anything, merely gesturing to Ackerman to follow her. She led him towards the hideout's large hall.

Hunters of Spider were sorting out the spoils of war and dealing with captives. Clearing up the battlefield was naturally left to the Seed of Desire.

This round of attacks consisted of elites of the other two hunter organizations. From the moment their forces were wiped out, the tables were turned.

Upon seeing Ji Zhixiu arrive, Marcus and Kaiyi immediately greeted her.

They had been close confidants to Ji Zhixiu for many years and she now made them deputy leaders.

Naturally, their eyes were drawn to Ackerman as he entered. They could sense the faint suppressive-ness from this senior and were acquainted after Ji Zhixiu's short introduction.

Marcus and Kaiyi exchanged glances of delight. They never expected such strong support.

Although their lady had that strange Seed of Desire, no sane person would hate having a Destructive-rank fighter on their side.

Kaiyi came over and said softly, "Miss, Sir Haywood has arrived and is looking for you."

"I see." Ji Zhixiu patted Kaiyin on her shoulder and smiled. "I was about to seek him out too. Where is he? Lead me to him."

'Steel Resolve' had sensed Haywood's arrival sometime ago.

Kaiyi nodded and led the way.

Ji Zhixiu beckoned to Ackerman. "Please come along. Mr. Haywood is a powerful white magician and also a special guest of my father's. He is no stranger."

Ackerman noticed that there was an underlying meaning from Ji Zhixiu's expression and understood that his help was required. Thus, he nodded. "As you wish, Leader."

Haywood had been temporarily allocated an empty room. As a white magician employed by Rolle Resource Development, he didn't lack money and had a special status. Currently, the humble reception disgusted him.

However, he still put on a bright smile when he saw Ji Zhixiu's arrival. "Young Miss, I heard that you want me for a new 'Loyalty' brand..."

Swish!

Ji Zhixiu's cane rotated abruptly and the blade sprang out. With narrowed eyes and a chilling smile, she said, "Yes, I want you to mark yourself with a 'Loyalty' brand."

Haywood stiffened up. “W-What do you mean by that?”

His expression quickly darkened. “This is an insult and provocation to a white magician. Even your father wouldn’t dare treat a reputable white magician this way!”

Haywood was livid. But before he could continue with his tirade, Ackerman had appeared behind him without making a sound, pressing the sharp tip of a dagger against his neck.

This cut off his rant, and with a trembling voice, Haywood muttered, “Please stop!”

“Do you value your reputation, or your life?” asked Ji Zhixiu.

Gulp.

Haywood swallowed. “My... My life...” He was now fully aware that his business in selling the method to crack the ‘Loyalty’ brand had been exposed.

“So, I would like to ask how your ‘Loyalty’ brand loses its effectiveness for no reason?”

“I...I...” Haywood raised his hands and exclaimed, “It’s all the Ash Chamber of Commerce’s fault! They said to provide me an absolutely confidential environment for transactions and with safe parties to deal with. That enticed me!”

At the same time, far away from the night of carnage, nothing affected the tranquility of the bookstore.

By lamp light, Lin Jie flipped through his register to check for Wilde’s address and contact information.

Chapter 134: Visiting Old Wil

Chapter 134: Visiting Old Wil

Previously, Lin Jie had told Joseph that he didn't have Wilde's address.

This was actually a lie.

However, protecting the privacy of customers was a virtue of any business. Although he simply studied folklore, opening a bookstore meant that there was a set of principles to follow.

After Claude had left, Lin Jie took out the registry and began to look for Wilde's address and contact information.

Although the registry wasn't too thick, Wilde usually held onto books for a long time before returning them. Lin Jie only remembered jotting down some related information in the registry when Wilde first borrowed a book, but that was only a vague memory and he couldn't remember what the contents were. Thus, he had to flip through the pages again.

Lin Jie finally found the phone number and address Wilde had written down from two years ago when he flipped all the way till the first page.

"387th Avenue ...That's close to the Lower District. Old Wil lives so far away, getting here must be hard for him." Lin Jie sighed.

Such a distance would take three to four hours even by car. Even so, Old Wil still came all the way here just to check out books. This only made Lin Jie more worried about this old empty nester.

When a mind doesn't have much to hope for, one might be more susceptible to being tricked by others.

Lin Jie decided in the end that he wasn't going to call Wilde, as he still didn't know Wilde's association with this "Blood Feast." He

could be alerting Wilde for no reason if he called out of the blue.

He would pay a visit and examine Old Wil's state before deciding what to do.

There wouldn't be much of an issue if Old Wil was still sensible. But if Old Wil wasn't home by chance, Lin Jie decided that he would wait a few days and see if there's any clues that he had aided this criminal organization.

With Mu'en now watching over the store, Lin Jie had the luxury of traveling further away for a longer time now.

If Old Wil had really gotten brainwashed into becoming a member of a criminal organization, then Lin Jie would do whatever it took to brainwash him back.

Of course, Lin Jie had also considered the possibility that going over like this could be dangerous, but he was certain that Old Wil would look for him first if he was feeling lost or had doubts.

Now, this had happened so abruptly and Lin Jie hadn't even gotten any news from him. Therefore, either Old Wil had a plan of his own and was in a stable situation, or he had no time to ask anyone for help and had already fallen into their clutches.

In any case, there were two potential scenarios. Either things would turn out alright without Lin Jie's help, or Lin Jie had to go no matter what.

While it might be a little dangerous, I ought to be capable of self-defense when facing ordinary folk now, according to Silver.

Lin Jie put down his pen and rubbed his chin, deep in thought.

That fruit from before...hmm...No idea how it changed my body. It does feel like I have gotten stronger than before, but nothing else feels different.

Swordsmanship is effective in actual combat. I'll get Mu'en to make me a violin case and I'll bring Candela's sacred sword along... Once I've mastered this swordsmanship, Silver will be able to tell me about the

history of the Second Era. I'm really looking forward to it.

It's really all these un-allocated aether that is an issue. I really need to craft a dream of my own, but the progress is just slow.

Dreaming is easy, but creating a crystal clear dream exactly the same as the way it is visualized... Now that's a difficult task. I wonder if Silver gave me the hardest method on purpose.

Unknowingly, Lin Jie had begun to sort the issues at hand. After being in deep thought for a long while, he realized that it was already pretty late. With a sigh, he shook his head and went upstairs to sleep.

On this night, he met Silver in the dream again.

The darkness came as usual, followed by fluttering snowflakes.

Over the next few nights, Lin Jie continued to learn swordsmanship and dream crafting from Silver.

After telling Silver of his troubles and doubts, she simply responded that she didn't know how humans sensed and used aether. Instead, she taught Lin Jie her own method, firmly believing that Lin Jie would be able to do so.

Lin Jie would often think that Silver was the most irresponsible teacher he had ever seen.

He also found out that Silver wasn't human, but Silver didn't say what she was.

Of course, Lin Jie maintained his respect towards Silver throughout all of this. After all, he was already in Silver's dreams and fighting with monsters. Monsters that were all controlled by her.

If Silver got upset, Lin Jie would wake up the next day with a sore body.

Silver used the fact that whatever happens in a dream would partially mirror reality as a means of motivating Lin Jie, and couldn't understand why Lin Jie felt that this was odd.

However, Lin Jie was finally able to construct his first prototype dream using this method.

Some nights were extremely tiresome, and other nights even more so. Thus, Lin Jie decided to rest quite a bit during the day, which made him appear as if he were a lazy bum that slept all the time.

This went on till Mu'en finished making a suitably-sized violin case to hold the sacred sword.

Lin Jie instructed Mu'en to watch the shop and taught her the process of helping customers check out books before finally embarking on the journey to save Old Wil.

It was moments after Lin Jie stepped out. Turning to the side, he noticed some vines growing up on the wall and forming words in a dark alley nearby.

"This way."

Indeed, the green vines formed an arrow that pointed towards the alley.

"Blackie?"

Lin Jie immediately understood that Blackie had come to help once again.

"It does seem like Blackie has been appearing a lot more lately and has become very willing to help."

He figured that he must've done something to please Blackie recently.

Lin Jie hadn't promoted his own books recently, but had properly guided Hood's youthful chuunibyou gang off a stray path into a proper one.

In addition, Father Vincent, who had been drowning in addiction, had found renewed hope and now sought out the truth thanks to his motivation.

Seems like Blackie approves of my ways and wants me to continue, Lin Jie thought to himself as he walked into the alley.

His surroundings turned pitch black instantly. But in the next two steps, the darkness melted away and the door of what seemed like a small mansion appeared just in front of him.

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow. It seemed that Blackie's power had a similar sensation to the time when he had first transmigrated to this world.

Regardless, he decided he would check up on Old Wil's situation first.

Reaching out his hand, he knocked on the door.

Wilde had just begun to perform a new round of sacrificial rituals with fresh blood and the dismembered limbs of dream beasts. And at the center of all of it was the grossly mutated body of Heris.

Knock knock.

Wilde's face paled at once. He hadn't noticed any shift in the aether. How could someone have mysteriously appeared at his front door out of nowhere?!

He waved his hand, and the scene outside his door appeared in midair before him.

A young man with a gentle smile, holding a case materialized out of thin air, then knocked on the front door.

"Boss Lin?! Why has he come? Could it be because of my secret plans?"

Wilde momentarily dumbfounded. He then remembered his hands were still covered with blood and the house seemed a little too cramped... and ill-fitting for this visit.

Chapter 135: My Followers?

Chapter 135: My Followers?

Lin Jie waited outside for some time before the door finally opened slowly.

Old Wil, whom he hadn't seen in a long time, appeared in a loose black robe with intricate golden patterns. He didn't have on his signature mask, revealing his pale, scarred face that broke into a warm smile from behind the door.

This wasn't the first time Lin Jie had seen Wilde's true face. In fact, during their first encounter, the dejected Wilde wasn't even wearing any mask.

However, Lin Jie wasn't one to judge by appearances and chose to impart chicken soup to the Old Wil of that time and even recommended the first book, ***Resurrection***, to him.

Wilde opened the door wider and gestured to Lin Jie to come in. Cautiously, he asked, "Boss Lin, what are you doing here?"

"There's something I wish to speak with you about, but you haven't come to borrow books recently. Since my newly hired assistant is helping to watch the store, I had some free time and came over," chuckled Lin Jie as he entered.

"I hope my visit isn't a bother to you."

"No, no." Wilde immediately put his hands up. "It's my honor to be paid a personal visit by you."

"That's good. To be honest, you really do live quite a distance away. I even thought that I would have to spend a couple of hours on public transport."

As he closed the door, Wilde couldn't help thinking to himself, *I clearly saw you show up at my doorstep out of nowhere!*

With a dry laugh, he explained, “You do know that I need a quieter environment to stay in.”

“Indeed, it can be a tad troublesome without a conducive environment given the research nature of your job. This, I understand fully.” Lin Jie couldn’t help nodding in agreement when he thought about the remoteness of his own bookstore.

While Lin Jie was exchanging these pleasantries, his eyes were instinctively drawn to the clothes Old Wil was wearing.

His clothes had a quaint air of mystery, like the robes of a wizard. It was something that most people would never wear out. *Hmm... Could this be Old Wil’s pajamas? Haha, he might be old, but he has the heart of a chuunibyou, haa. But till the day they die, men will always be boys,* Lin Jie mused to himself. Wilde suddenly noticed Lin Jie’s gaze gliding over his robe, one that represented the disciples of ‘Black Emperor’ Augustus. Then, the bookstore gave him a knowing smile.

Afraid that Wilde would think he was judging him, Lin Jie immediately played it cool and complimented, “You have good taste in clothes, Old Wil.”

Wilde felt his heart skip a beat. *Does he imply that my teacher is great and I chose the right one!*

A bold guess once again came into his mind. *Boss Lin, h-he knows Teacher!*

Wilde recalled the book, ***Void Extinguishing***, which he had found hard to understand. The book was a strange world of magic that tried to connect the rules of life and death. At that time, the bookstore owner had said that the book had been written by a giant.

But... Augustus was the last surviving giant from the First Era. Besides him, there were no other giants in the world.

Therefore, either the book had survived from the First Era, or it had been written by Augustus. Perhaps... It was just like how Wilde had

presented his most favored creation masterpiece to the bookstore owner. Augustus might have given his best work to Lin Jie.

Regardless of whichever the case, the bookstore owner's mysticism seemed even more profound, just like layer upon layer of mist, which one's eyes had no way of penetrating and seeing what was hidden behind.

Perhaps... he might even be a true god.

Wilde felt a little dizzy from his own conjecture. He led Lin Jie to sit down, poured water for the both of them, and took a few sips to calm down.

Placing his cup down, Wilde decided to make clear his position and expressed cautiously. "Thank you for your compliment. I think so as well. To me, this piece of clothing holds a very special significance. It represents the most important period of my life that I will never forget."

Lin Jie nodded. *So that's why... He kept it up till now for the sake of reminiscing his youth. Old Wil really misses the past. Haa... It's no wonder he was cheated by his own child.*

Such a person definitely isn't capable of being an evildoer... If he has indeed gotten involved with that 'Blood Feast' organization, then he must have been forced or has an agenda.

From Old Wil's manner, Lin Jie believed it was likely to be the latter.

Wilde observed Lin Jie carefully, noticing the bookstore owner's face soften a little with a hint of tacit approval.

Inwardly, he heaved a sigh of relief and asked, "Have you come to me because of my arbitrary decision?"

Lin Jie leaned forward slightly, folding his arms and resting them on his knees out of habit. With a straight face, he said, "That's right. You've gotten involved with 'Blood Feast', right? Have you forgotten my advice to you back then?"

Wilde's face turned solemn. "Actually, I wish to use their upcoming gathering to convince them to become your followers and customers of your bookstore."

?!!

"Hold up." Lin Jie put up a hand and asked, "My followers?"

Wilde realized he had spoken out of line. The bookstore owner had never said he needed followers. He had always recommended books to customers, guiding them out of their predicament and into a new life.

What made him truly understand Lin Jie's intention was that book, ***Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies***, because of the various sacrificial rituals written inside. A sacrificial ritual was done as a tribute to someone or something. The methods depicted in the book were so brutal and cruel, so if this someone was a god, it would definitely be an evil god. Since Boss Lin had written this book, then, without a doubt, he held the position of a preacher.

But in actuality, Wilde's guess had been that the two were the same... which resulted in this accidental gaffe.

"Cough, cough. I meant... believers in books." Wilde covered his mouth and coughed dryly. Then with a determined look in his eyes, he said, "I've always been indebted to the help you've given me. I've thought about it many times over. Just one gargoyle isn't sufficient to repay you, but anything material seems so insignificant.

"So, I decided to practice your ideology, letting those astray find the true meaning of life and also get them to listen to your teachings!"

"..."

Lin Jie had a complicated look in his eyes. Never had he imagined that this was the reason why Old Wil had joined 'Blood Feast'.

No, this can't be considered 'joining'. This is an 'infiltration' to instigate a revolt and break up this organization from the inside! He...He's so enlightened! Lin Jie was touched. His two years of serving chicken

soup hadn't gone to waste.

However, this was too dangerous for a man of Old Wil's age so he decided to try and advise him once again.

"Old Wil, your intentions are really good, but..." Lin Jie's eyes froze, his gaze passing over Old Wil's shoulder and falling on the partition wall behind. Dark red blood was oozing out on the floor.

"But what is that?"

Chapter 136: Let Me Teach You How

Chapter 136: Let Me Teach You How

Lin Jie saw the oozing blood on the floor, then looked towards Wilde before falling into thought.

From his experience, he was certain that it was blood and not hot sauce or some other red substance.

And there was certainly quite a lot, judging from the growing puddle. The source had to be either a large container of blood or some sort of large animal.

So obviously, two questions sprang to his mind.

First, what animal was this blood from?

Second, why was there so much fresh blood on the floor of Wilde's house?

As a normal person with a normal mind, Lin Jie's first reaction was astonishment before he quickly thought, *Could this be human blood?*

However, he quickly dismissed this speculation because Wilde was still natural, relaxed, and sincere up till now. He had even been chatting enthusiastically with Lin Jie and definitely didn't act like a 'murderer'.

Lin Jie who had known Old Wil for quite some time also believed that the old man wouldn't deceive him. And even if he was lying, Old Wilde would definitely act peculiar.

Most importantly, Old Wil's words a moment ago had completely moved Lin Jie and made him believe that the beautiful vision Old Wil had was genuine.

"Letting those astray find the true meaning of life." Look, how

thoughtful and enlightened he is!

It could be said that Old Wil could fully appreciate the essence of Lin Jie's chicken soup.

While other customers still waited to be led by Lin Jie, Old Wil had not only emerged from the haze of the past but also even planned to start learning and applying what he had gained to others. He had inherited Lin Jie's will and chose to guide other downtrodden people to discover a new meaning of life.

If this isn't love, then I don't know what love is.

"Get them to listen to your teachings," Such a high-level way of thinking. Not only does he put into practice what he learns, he even understands my desire for money... No, haa, my desire to guide customers warmheartedly.

Committing to help those that had gotten caught up in this multi-level criminal organization and bringing them to the bookstore for chicken soup and to cleanse their souls.

If this isn't compassion, then I don't know what compassion is.

Such love and compassion was what Lin Jie was willing to believe in.

He finally steadied himself and decided to ascertain the truth of the matter first.

After Old Wil had poured out all these enlightened thoughts, being misunderstood would be a really massive blow to this empty nester.

Moreover, given the existence and connection to 'Blood Feast', this blood could also be their doing.

Lin Jie remained calm and placed a hand on the violin case beside him. If it was really 'Blood Feast', then, he wouldn't be able to wait for Old Wil's intervention and just do his utmost to cleanse their filthy hearts.

Upon hearing his words, Wilde, who was opposite Lin Jie,

immediately turned around and followed Lin Jie's line of sight. His expression suddenly paled and he got up hurriedly. *He's surely seen the blood!*

"I'm terribly sorry!" Visibly upset, Wilder quickly got up and went over. "I was only tidied up in a hurry and didn't expect this to happen!"

"What a disgrace, I'm truly sorry that you have to see such an unclean sight. I'll deal with it right away. Just a moment!"

Wilde behaved so naturally as if there was nothing strange and this was something he usually did. Thus, Lin Jie relaxed and asked casually, "What's up with the blood?"

Wilde smiled awkwardly and a sense of guilt washed over him.

It's over, Boss Lin must be very displeased.

He had followed the sacrificial ritual according to Corpse Devouring Sect: Rites & Ceremonies that Boss Lin had written himself. Clearly, what ought to be a sacred and elegant ritual had been made so unseemly...

Wilde tried to justify himself in his mind.

I'm a black magician that frequently kills and slaughters. Destruction is in my blood and my lack of technical proficiency in dealing with these raw materials is rough around the edges.

Next time! I'll definitely pay more attention to the ritual next time!

It was fine when nobody saw it, but having his crude technique exposed in front of Boss Lin was just downright embarrassing.

Boss Lin's words are chastising me for my carelessness.

A merciless Destructive-rank black magician in the eyes of others, Wilde was now like a timid student who had made a mistake in the science laboratory.

He carefully tried to explain. "Uhm, after reading your work, I've

been working hard to try out some of these rituals but...

“How should I put this... It’s somewhat difficult. It’s hard to understand some of the meanings, and replicating it is tough, so...”

Wilde gave a sheepish smile as he pointed at the blood on the ground. “So it turned out like this.”

Lin Jie was stunned for a moment before his lips twitched.

What the... Trying out?!

The stuff written in his book was mostly about Chinese folk customs, and of course, it touched upon some rituals from ancient times.

For example, ancient emperors would often have a ritual where they sacrifice ‘Tai Lao’ (Cow, Sheep, Pig) to the gods, while lower officials would sacrifice ‘Shao Lao’ (Sheep, Pig).

And in ancient taoist beliefs, three species of deer formed the three sacrificial animals to which the deities relished.

There were other rituals such as ‘Raising the Golden Beam’ and ‘Commemorating Gods’ where the steps, sacrificial objects, and meaning were all explained in the book.

And to make the book more interesting and because ancient Chinese sacrificial ceremonies were about food and culture, Lin Jie would often add in some food customs and methods of preparing them so that the book’s content wouldn’t be too boring.

Haa... Old Wil. You are really one inquisitive old man.

Lin Jie never expected that Wilde would go beyond just reading to actually trying to imitate the rituals in the book!

A finely dressed and refined western gentleman with rolled-up sleeves, brandishing a knife and slaughtering a chicken, duck or maybe even a pig... Then bleeding it out and removing the innards...

The imagery wasn’t beautiful and Lin Jie didn’t dare imagine

further.

Lin Jie didn't know whether to laugh or cry, but the worry in his heart had dissipated slightly.

No wonder... How could it not end in disaster?

The stuff written in his book were all Chinese dishes...

Even a Chinese person with no culinary experience would find it extremely difficult, much less a westerner like Old Wil.

Lin Jie could almost imagine the messy and miserable scene behind the partition wall.

"Uhh, what can I say?" Lin Jie sighed as he noticed Old Wil's awkward expression. "Let me teach you how it's done."

Wilde waved his hands to decline. "What I've done is too unsightly and might thoroughly disgust you..."

"Alright then." Lin Jie revealed a relieved smile, understanding the heart of a novice chef wanting to hide his failures.

"I'll just stay here and give you instructions from a distance. How about you tell me which step you are at?"

Chapter 137: Sacrificial Ritual

Chapter 137: Sacrificial Ritual

Wilde walked into the room and surveyed his unfinished sacrificial ritual.

The purpose of this ritual was to extract the blood of the Sky Wolf within Heris, and tracing back to the source using the power of this 'evil' god, to reconstruct an actual Sky Wolf that controlled space and time.

If successful, he would have a Destructive-rank dream beast as a familiar spirit.

For this ritual, he had chosen to use 'Precant' Morpheus's Coffin of Eternal Slumber as the 'altar'. With its power of 'resurrection', it would simplify and bring much stronger purpose to this ritual.

This powerful sorcery tool belonging to the leader of Scarlet Cult had been sought out and fought over after her death before eventually falling into the hands of Wilde.

In addition, the offerings in this ritual were 'a two-winged messenger of the sun with a red crown and sharp talons', 'a pale, fat and four-limbed body signifying the sins of avarice, incompetence, and foolishness', as well as 'an intoxicating fluid that could cause excitement, paralysis, and loss of rationality'.

Wilde, a well-learned black magician, quickly understood that the offerings in this ritual were the 'crimson brimstone wyvern', a 'sinner of avarice' as well as 'depraved potion'.

For this ritual, it wasn't difficult to acquire the offerings. However, the steps needed were way more complicated than any other ceremony he had done in the past. Currently, Wilde was on his third try.

To ensure the effectiveness of the ritual, Wilde had done his utmost

to acquire the best possible offerings.

For example, Wilde had chosen the illustrious head of a noble family from Norzin as his offering for the 'sinner of avarice'.

This fellow's true identity was actually the son of a commoner and had no relation to this family at all.

That's right. He had assumed an identity within the family, and eventually became the patriarch.

Back then, this noble family was experiencing a crisis and entrusted a loyal servant with their newly born son to flee and bring him out of harm's way.

The loyal servant fled with the youngest son but was unwittingly discovered. Thus, he handed the young boy to his friend and his wife before luring the pursuers and eventually sacrificing himself.

The couple themselves had recently given birth to a boy, and thus pretended to have had twins, raising them both together.

In the end, that noble family escaped disaster and rose again, but had unfortunately lost all their heirs because of the turmoil.

Hence, they sent people out to look for that young son.

One day, the commoner son inadvertently overheard his parents talking about it and avarice started to cloud his heart. He suggested an idea of swapping his identity with that of the noble family's heir but his parents didn't agree with it.

Because of his parent's objection, the commoner son killed them.

After that, he also killed the true son of the noble family and used a keepsake to fake his identity and enter the noble family.

During the entire process, his avarice swelled. By cooperating with black magicians, he turned his fake identity's mother and sisters into his slaves. He also killed anyone who might know the truth and treated them cruelly till they died. Eventually, he also managed to get the old family patriarch killed, installing himself as the new

patriarch, and taking control of this noble family.

Such a remarkable history made him the perfect sin offering, and he was now a corpse on the altar dripping with blood.

Most of the blood that had flowed onto the ground came from this avaricious man known as Jeffrey Norton.

Wilde approached the altar constructed from the Coffin of Eternal Slumber. Going from the bright hall to the dark gloomy corner shrouded his sinister face in the shadows, leaving only his beady, green serpentine eyes reflecting the cold light.

His gaze fell on the pale and plump limbs on the altar.

With some chagrin, he sighed. "I've just done the blood-letting stage... The rituals in your book are really quite difficult and the descriptions used are rather cryptic. It takes me quite a bit of time to digest and understand all these.

"You even have to personally guide me, because of my ineptitude. I truly apologize for this."

Lin Jie took his seat once more and drank some tea. "Don't be sad, Old Wil. I already said from the start that this can only provide you with some ideas, after all the language and culture gulf is just too vast. It's normal that you wouldn't understand. Everyone has their own specializations and perhaps you need to find someone adept in this area to help you."

This book had crossed over two worlds and it was only natural that Old Wil wouldn't understand a lot of things written inside.

And there was also the issue of cooking which required some skill and moreover, the cuisines were completely different.

"You are right." Old Wil let out a sigh of relief.

Lin Jie returned to the issue at hand. "Blood-letting... It's rather difficult for a beginner. Actually, I'm not very good at it too and have gotten it all over the floor too. Ha-ha-ha-ha."

Old Wil laughed dryly. "You are kidding me."

"Alright, no more jokes." Lin Jie toned down a little and went on, "You will continue to prepare the offerings next by removing the innards."

"Remove...Removing the innards?"

"Yes. Later on, each different viscera has to be cleaned separately. Now, first use your hands. Oh... this step can't be done with tools. Old Wil, I suggest you wear a glove if you are afraid of getting dirty. Use your hands to dig out all the organs. Remember to scoop them all out till it's clean."

"Alright... I'll try my best. All of it?" Old Wil was somewhat hesitant. He might be a brutal black magician, but he had never done something so cruel and perverse before.

Boss Lin is a preacher of an evil god indeed. He's able to easily achieve what the other faiths can't.

"Yes, all of it. Remember to clean the intestines another time. It would also be better to stuff it with strong spices. After all, I don't think that the gods would want to eat an offering that has a peculiar aftertaste," Lin Jie smiled and cracked a joke.

Wilde acknowledged, thinking to himself that the spices probably meant the depraving potion.

After that, Lin Jie heard all sorts of weird sounds from behind the partition wall.

It's probably just the sound of cooking. There's nothing strange to it.

After waiting for a while, Lin Jie received word that Wilde was done.

Smiling, he resumed giving out instructions. "Now that these innards are ready for use, I'll teach you an interesting rite. Cut out a large piece of meat without any bone, then use..."

Lin Jie paused mid sentence. He had wanted to say chopsticks, but

realized that Wilde had never used chopsticks nor knew what they were. Thus, he modified his instructions.

“Use four thin wooden sticks and thrust them into the four corners of the meat. Then, place the intestines within and wrap them up into a ball.”

Old Wil seemed to gasp, hesitating for a moment before asking cautiously, “W-What does this rite do?”

This cruel ritual reeking of blood had an ancient barbarism that was peculiar, devious, and terrifying.

“Uhh... This ceremony is to pray for blessings and it can bring about good fortune and goodwill from others.”

Lin Jie changed the original saying ‘bless our children and grandchildren to meet benefactors everywhere they go’ into a fat white lie to protect Wilde.

After explaining it, he chuckled, “It’s a special sacrificial ceremony from a certain region that I’ve written about in my book before. Isn’t it very interesting?”

Wilde couldn’t help but shudder. *Is this the blessing of the corpse devourers? To lightly treat these offerings in such a twisted manner, as if everything were just playthings...*

“Interesting, very interesting indeed.” The black magician mused, feeling as if he had stepped into the gates of a new world.

[Author Note: This is an actual sacrificial ritual in the Shaoxing during the Spring Festival where they roll up chicken or duck intestines inside pork on chopsticks.]

Chapter 138: Its Cooked

Chapter 138: It's Cooked

Lin Jie ordered Old Wil to first clean up the sacrificial offerings so that they could be presented as they should be.

Unfortunately, due to the circumstances of it all, Old Wil hadn't prepared many of the items required. He couldn't even understand some of the vocabulary that was used, so he relied on Lin Jie to "translate" them in a way that would allow a person of Azir to understand.

However, the issue with this was that the current ceremony had deviated from the original.

Lin Jie had foreseen this as a problem, so he had recommended the book to Wilde from the very start as a means to familiarize himself with the culture before learning the language. Who knew that Wilde would dive so deeply into this book, so much so that he even practiced the rituals recorded in it?

But these special local customs were quite fascinating, just like a box of chocolates full of mystery. There were so many mysterious customs and ceremonies hidden away in any vast land, waiting for people to discover.

This was precisely why Lin Jie loved studying folklore.

Although Wilde wasn't able to grasp the full meanings behind the text, Lin Jie was still willing to patiently explain it to him.

When Lin Jie finished his cup of tea, Old Wil had just about finished his preparation as well.

Lin Jie suddenly slapped his forehead, remembering something important. He put down his tea and asked, "Old Wil, is the sacrifice cooked?"

Wilde was exceptionally excited as he observed the strangely-shaped sacrificial offerings drenched in depraving potion in the Coffin of Eternal Slumber—the ‘sinner of avarice’ had its limbs and bones removed, leaving a tidy lump of white flesh. Four wooden stakes were pierced through its flesh and the crystallized intestines of the crimson brimstone wyvern were twirled around the stakes, forming a rather special array.

The depraving potion had been evaporated by the high temperatures of the crimson brimstone wyvern intestines, creating a mist that slowly engulfed the array, flickering with a dim light like the twinkling of stars.

The white flesh on the underside was quickly cooked by the residual temperature, causing carbonized cracks to form.

Thus, the black magician stared at a blackened portion of the meat and started nodding.

“It’s cooked, it appears to be well-cooked.”

Suddenly, Wilde seemed to realize the meaning of this ritual. *The top and the bottom are just like the heavens and earth!*

With a parallel similar to the universe, this ritual is really grand indeed. No wonder it has the ability to increase luck...

At that moment, the philosopher’s stone which laid on top of the coffin started to absorb the blood and energy from the crimson brimstone wyvern, the sinner of avarice, and the depraving potion.

The blood-red light got bright and a strange pattern like a door formed above the altar.

The sacrificial ceremony has properly begun!

Wilde looked towards the body of Heris placed on the other side of the Coffin of Eternal Slumber. Blood from his body had flowed along the coffin and gathered around the philosopher’s stone.

This blood was purified and gradually evaporated to a red mist which rose up and clustered together like a gathering nebula,

gradually condensing into what seemed like branches that resembled nerves and muscle fiber that flashed like lightning.

And at the very center of the nebula was a collapsed domain that looked like a wormhole.

This meant that the embryonic form of the Sky Wolf had appeared!

Perfection!

Wilde couldn't contain his excitement. Getting advice from Boss Lin made this resurrection ritual more stable and effective than any other rituals he had done in the past!

Moreover, the addition of the depraving potion would weaken the will of the resurrected creature, allowing the caster to control it more easily. The energy of the crimson brimstone wyvern made it more aggressive and explosive, while the soul of the sinner of avarice made it wise and active.

Every sacrificial offering gave it the perfect enhancements for controllability and power.

Marvelous!

"It's all good as long as it's cooked." Lin Jie was relieved.

"Oh right, did you collect the blood that you drained, Old Wil?" asked Lin Jie.

"I did." Wilde nodded his head. The collected blood was placed beside him.

"Add water and salt to the blood, boil, then freeze it so that it solidifies. You can then cut it into pieces to use as sacrificial offerings too."

Wilde was momentarily stunned before his astonishment turned into delight. *What a convenient way of storing blood! Wouldn't it be possible to perform sacrificial rituals from anywhere if it can be stored like this?!*

There were many instances in the past where Wilde wanted to do a sacrificial ritual yet had to find materials on the spot. Besides being slow, such rituals were sometimes conducted in extremely dangerous situations and the risk of being caught was high.

Ah, how has nobody ever invented this before. God damn! Our stupidity is through the roof!

In comparison, the sacrificial methods of the Corpse Devouring Sect is an art form.

My previous rituals were all crude imitations. This is the real deal!

“Thank you for all your guidance!” Wilde was trembling with excitement. “I will definitely spread your work far and wide! This is a perfect masterpiece that should be learned by many more!”

This kind of flattery... Haa, Old Wil has really gotten much better , thought Lin Jie to himself.

“There’s no need to stand on ceremony, it was really nothing much...” Lin Jie replied with a smile.

Suddenly, he paused for a moment before asking, “Do you still wish to go to ‘Blood Feast’?”

“Uhh, to be honest, it seems a little dangerous... How about this, I recently received this Coin of Destiny. One side represents good fortune, while the other represents misfortune.

“Let’s point you the right way using the coin. If the outcome isn’t good, then don’t go.”

Lin Jie was really going to great lengths for the sake of trying to dupe Old Wil into turning back.

He fished out the coin from his pocket and looked towards Old Wil.

Wilde’s heart pounded hard and his beady eyes narrowed.

Is... Is that the legendary Coin of Destiny?!

Blended in the darkness of a shadow, shadow assassin Debra appeared at the ritual spot.

“Such cruel and terrifying methods for a sacrificial ritual... It’s no wonder the Faceless-Black scaled Man is known as a black magician whose name alone terrifies people,” muttered Debra as she looked away from the bloody altar in disgust.

Even though she frequently performed assassinations as well as interrogation and torture missions, such a scene still made her uncomfortable.

She had always heard about Wilde’s brutality, but she never expected it to be at this sort of level...

She silently turned herself into a shadow, hiding all traces of herself until Wilde had tidied up and returned back to the hall and sat down opposite that young man.

Only then did she meld into the shadow of Wilde’s glass cup and release the poison discreetly.

‘Voice of Doom’ is so potent that even a Destructive-rank black magician wouldn’t be able to withstand it... Hehehe... how dare he sacrifice the tool that we have painstakingly groomed for so long, Debra sneered in silence and waited for Wilde to drink the poison.

Then, she saw the seemingly ordinary young man smile as he took out a coin.

Chapter 139: Shattered Glass

Chapter 139: Shattered Glass

Debra didn't have a name. She was a pure assassin, trained since adoption, and the only significant tool she ever had since her birth was a useful knife.

Despite many years of brutal training and even having her body modified into a penumbra creature that greatly increased her ability to conceal herself, Debra bore no grudge nor took it for granted. She was proud of being able to provide her strength to the organization.

She wasn't qualified to know the real name of the organization and could only remember its symbol—a long sword cloaked in flames.

Debra had a fervent love for the organization. She knew how powerful the organization was with its far reaching resources and how they constantly pushed towards a path of light and righteousness.

They had many enemies, and they would make enemies with the rest of the world. But their cause was absolutely just and they would eventually achieve victory!

For this reason, Debra was willing to be an insignificant stepping stone in the pioneering process of creating this new world.

This was her life's purpose. All the pain and sacrifice was for a great cause, even if it meant death!

Therefore, when she was tasked to assassinate Wilde, she accepted it without hesitation.

She even accepted an extremely painful second modification that allowed her to become a true umbra creature. There was a very special gap within reality and dream, known as the 'shadow realm', where umbra creatures could inhabit temporarily.

Normally, umbra creatures weren't aggressive and were just like plankton, spending all their time jumping through shadows, feeding, merging, and continuously being born.

They were discordant with the real world and only very few magicians could manipulate them, however, this was merely composed of changing the shape of their shadow, or making an umbra creature leave the shadows.

However, an umbra creature couldn't leave the shadow realm, just like how a fish couldn't be out of water for long without dying.

Summoning these creatures wasn't of much use, and as time passed, umbra creatures weren't of much interest to anyone.

Debra was a failed specimen of the organization's new experiment involving the shadow realm. The process involved forcefully merging with an umbra creature.

Beings like her were termed 'shadow bugs' by the organization. The outside world referred to these mysterious killers as 'shadow assassins'.

She could shuttle freely between reality and shadow, but had to endure an excruciating and soul wrenching pain each time she melded into the shadow realm.

Many shadow bugs went crazy and killed themselves because of this.

But everything is all worth it! All who stand in the organization's way must die!

Debra knew that Heris' name was on a certain list.

He was another tool different from her, but much more useful and more difficult to control. Therefore, the costs of planning by the organization was high. Heris should have used the Magic Ovum Mirror to summon a Supreme-rank dream beast that the organization required, and he would have absorbed Scarlet Cult as well as a large number of small to medium-sized hunter organizations and merge to become an even more useful tool to the

organization.

However, because of Wilde's intervention, Heris had died and became a sacrificial offering. On top of that, White Wolf and Scarlet Cult were destroyed and the hunters forces that were supposed to be integrated had become a brand new hunter organization.

The organization's years of meticulous planning had all gone down the drain!

This was the information Debra received. She was to remove all obstacles for the organization and therefore, Wilde had to die!

'Voice of Doom' would dissolve Wilde's thoughts and mind. In the beginning, it should feel as if ants were crawling all over his scalp before creeping into the cerebral cortex and brain. The extreme itching would destroy his will and cause him to start scratching till he tore his scalp, bored into his skull and finally dug up his already parched brain. Only then would he be free from the pain.

This was what Debra had envisaged and reveled in the imagination of his target's helpless struggles. After all, she was just a mere step from success.

This was her style of assassination. A clean hit without any delay. Wilde entertaining an ordinary person wasn't within her scope of consideration, but all she needed to do was hide and slip in the poison when she got the chance.

However, as she was waiting patiently, she suddenly saw that seemingly ordinary young man fish out a coin from his pocket and flipped it with a smile.

Ding.

The spinning coin froze in midair for a moment, the spindle engraved on its face was like a pupil, and the entire coin was like an eye that suddenly came alive.

An indescribable sensation gripped Debra's soul. As if she was being watched by something invisible, as if she was being held tightly by a formless hand. In an instant, she felt tremendous pressure and

absolute terror.

Run!

Run!

Run now!!!

Her instincts screamed at her, urging her to leave this place, for a great danger was coming.

However, she had no time to react, nor did she have any way to react.

The coin which had momentarily froze in midair descended, hitting the rim of Wilde's glass cup. It had probably hit a critical point of glass as a shallow crack appeared which quickly spread to the rest of the cup.

Crash!

The glass was instantly shattered into a thousand pieces by the coin and tiny translucent shards flew in all directions. The water within the glass spread out, enveloping half the table and all glass shards on it. But for some reason, the shadows of these shards seemed to vibrate with a slight tittering sound.

Ahh ahh ahh ahh—!!

Debra let out a silent shriek. The 'Voice of Doom' had slipped between the real world and the shadow realm and had fallen on her.

The real world wouldn't affect her if she were a true umbra creature.

And if she were a complete humanoid being, 'Voice of Doom' would only corrode her mind and not hurt the rest of her.

Unfortunately... there were no ifs.

She was a syncretic creature, affected by both reality and shadow.

And because of her part umbra creature characteristics, every part of her body was a complete thinking organ.

An itch like ants crawling all over spread throughout her body, boring in bit by bit. The pain was worse than traversing between the reality and the shadow realm, which made her want to crush and tear herself apart.

She started to dissolve, absorbing herself and regenerating, screaming in silence as it became a loop.

The scattered shadows didn't attract any attention.

Debra had no way to leave this place. This darkness, despair, and pain would accompany her for all time... With no end or conclusion.

Chink chink chink...

The coin hit the floor, bouncing several times then rolling for a bit before it fell, revealing the side that hadn't been marked with the red dot. Misfortune.

“Uhhh...”

Lin Jie's lips twitched as he stared at the table full of shattered glass, not knowing how things had turned out this way. Wilde's face darkened as he stood up abruptly, watching the shadows of the glass shards as if he were deep in thought.

Chapter 140: Changing The Topic

Chapter 140: Changing The Topic

Wilde jumped to his feet and stared at the shadow on the table that seemed to come alive for a moment.

Ordinary people wouldn't have noticed this minute change. The shadow seemed to shift slightly when the splash droplets hit it, but it quickly vanished.

And even if they did, most people, including transcendent beings, wouldn't understand what it was.

However, as a very resourceful black magician, Wilde knew a thing or two about the rarest of mysteries of the shadow world.

With his current strength level, there were only very few transcendent creatures that could appear under his nose without being detected, even if they were of Supreme-rank.

Shadow creatures just so happened to be one of them.

Someone used a shadow creature to poison this glass of water. It was fortunate that Boss Lin came to visit today, or I would have fallen for it.

No, no, no. Boss Lin must have known beforehand and came specially to save me. In the process, he even showed me the right way to do this sacrificial ritual and even reminded me...

Wilde's gratitude towards Lin Jie was beyond measure. Considering that he had been saved twice, Wilde's desire to repay Lin Jie was even greater.

But then, he wondered. *The shadow and the real world are supposed to be apart. How can a shadow creature be affected by the poison in the water?*

Then he recalled that in that moment, there was a slight whiff of blood from that shadow. That was something impossible for shadow creatures made of shadows and not constructed of flesh and blood.

Where did the smell of blood come from? This doesn't make sense!

Wilde's eyes grew darker as he stared at the glass shards.

This means that this isn't a shadow creature being controlled, but someone has done synthetic experiments to it.

As a black magician well-versed with the art of creationology himself, Wilde knew how dangerous and crude this synthesis could be. There was no regard to rationality in such an experiment and the resultant products were expected to be expendables with a short lifespan.

But it's quite a good idea indeed, especially for assassinations... If these things can be mass produced, the efficiency would be terrifying. Could it be that the unexplained assassinations of high-ranking transcendent beings have been victims of these synthetic shadow creatures?

Is this the true identity of those so-called 'shadow assassins'?

Wilde was staring so intensely at those shattered glass fragments that Lin Jie felt even more embarrassed.

Ahem... It's not my fault that this accident happened!

He had merely flipped the coin and it just so happened to hit the glass. And who would have expected this glass to be so weak that it shattered to pieces just like that. Was the coin too hard, or the glass too brittle?

Now, look at what you've done... thought Lin Jie to himself.

He had originally wanted to control his strength and flip a 'misfortune' to advise Old Wil not to go. However, this unexpected situation had occurred. A 'misfortune' had shown up, but it had hit the glass and hence could not be counted.

Moreover, Lin Jie seldom went out. He had tried flipping a coin for

divination on a visit to a customer's house and that resulted in a shattered glass. This situation was just too awkward!

Old Wil doesn't seem very pleased. He wouldn't be going to ask me to compensate... Would he?

"Cough, cough... Hey Old Wil, it was purely an accident, coincidence, random.... I also never imagined this to happen. You never expected that too, right?"

"Looks like this coin is rather accurate. I really feel unlucky... Heh, forget it. The result this time round is annulled. Let's try again."

The embarrassed Lin Jie walked over to pick up the coin that had rolled to the side. As he patted away the dust on it, he tried to change the subject. "By the way, your old friend Joseph's found clues of your stay on 52nd Avenue and is currently looking for you. Are you still going to continue hiding from him?"

I believe he will find stuff about an old friend more interesting... at least more interesting than a broken glass!

Wilde now extended his hand, revealing a ceremonial knife that peeked out from his black robes. The sharp knife tip came into contact with the water and shadow on the table, causing its intricate patterns to glow red as it absorbed the traces of poison within the water.

Ceremonial knives were an essential sorcery tool for black magicians, be it for sacrificial rites, offense, enchantment, or any other type of magic.

He used the ceremonial knife as a medium to analyze the toxin within the water and quickly understood that this was every spell-caster's nightmare, the 'Voice of Doom'.

Spell-casters often used aether to enhance their intellect, and their minds were multiple times more active and sensitive than most transcendent beings. If touched by the 'Voice of Doom', spell-casters would almost certainly die, and in the most excruciating fashion.

How vicious...

Wilde had certainly become a thorn in someone's side for such an assassination attempt to be launched on him. He had been silent for so long, and the only possible fuse had been his actions to guide Heris, White Wolf, and Scarlet Cult to ruin.

This matter was definitely more complicated than it seemed and there was surely someone behind it.

It was just unfortunate that the shadow assassin was thwarted by Boss Lin's Coin of Destiny and got afflicted by the 'Voice of Doom'.

That assassin has probably lost its mind, if not, I would at least be able to do some questioning...

Wilde's eyes narrowed, like dark green beads reflecting a cold light.

Hearing what Lin Jie said, the corner of Wilde's lips curled up into a slight smile. "Joseph... That's a name I haven't heard in quite some time. I haven't been hiding from him. He's indeed an old friend and we would often encounter each other. It's just that I haven't been very free...

"When I have the time, I will have to make him pay for all these years..."

Alas, Old Wil is indeed still upset with Joseph.

Even though I don't know what happened between them, it seems rather serious for Old Wil to remain brooding for so long.

But more importantly... The topic has been changed!

Lin Jie heaved a sigh of relief and went back to his seat. Looking around, he found a cloth placed beneath the tea cup and used it to carefully pick up the glass shards and threw them into the trash bin.

"It's been so many years. And there are some things that are meant to be forgotten. After all, the most important thing is to be happy."

Wilde kept away his ceremonial knife and nodded. "I understand. You are right. I won't take the initiative to seek him out as long as he doesn't look for me. But if he is coming, then I can't just sit

around and wait.”

Boss Lin doesn't hope to lose a customer indeed. After all, the spirit of Candela that was summoned back then was probably from Joseph's demon sword, but the trigger probably wasn't him. Secret Rite Tower has already discovered my tracks and perhaps it wouldn't be long before I cross paths with my old friend again.

Lin Jie also understood that the misunderstanding between these two old friends couldn't be resolved just by a few words. But... Everything was alright as long as the topic was changed.

He still had a doubt and thus asked, “Oh right, what exactly were you doing... When you were at 52nd Avenue?”

Before Lin Jie even finished. Wilde blurted out excitedly, “I'll show you the results right away, you won't be disappointed!”

From behind the wall came a hair-raising noise, followed by what sounded like the gasping and biting of a wild animal.

Grrr... Crunch!

Chapter 141: Husky

Chapter 141: Husky

Grr... Snarl!

Hearing such a ferocious sound coming from behind the wall, Lin Jie turned his head over subtly.

Then, a long bushy tail peeked out, swaying slightly before darting back. Moments later, it was replaced by a furry gray head.

It had two erect ears, a tongue sticking out, and pale blue eyes full of ferocious contempt. Its tail wagged from side to side and it raised a paw from time to time, seemingly exuding an intense desire to tear the house apart.

However, it had a silly-looking face. Clearly, this was the so-called ‘silly-but-cute,’ ‘chief-destroyer,’ and ‘never-let-it-go’ husky!

Being one of the ‘three foolish sled dogs’ indicated as much. [TL note: In Chinese, the Alaskan Malamute, Siberian Husky, and Samoyed are known as the foolish sled dog trio because of their silly and lovable nature that makes them endearing.] At first glance, this was indeed a fearsome wild beast... Moreover, it was standing at almost a meter tall and double the size of an ordinary husky. In truth, it even looked more like a ferocious wolf.

However, the Siberian Husky was a primitive dog breed with a lineage close to that of a wolf. Thus, the similarities between the two were of no surprise. Many of the wolves shown in dramas on television were actually played by huskies.

Despite how intimidating it seemed, those endearingly silly eyes revealed its goofy nature.

Lin Jie observed this ‘husky’ which was a breed known for its astonishing ability to wreck and make a mess of things. Finally, he turned towards Wilde and asked, “Is this what you got at 52nd

Avenue?”

Wilde nodded solemnly, clearly sensing the powerful and concentrated power of space and time from the lithe body of this explosive silver-furred dream beast. It was just like a small black hole, with a tremendous power contained within.

Without a doubt, this was an actual Sky Wolf!

A dream beast capable of traversing freely through time and space, tracking, pursuing, and hunting down any creature it takes an interest in.

“Yes. This was my objective for going to 52nd Avenue.” Wilde was somewhat proud of his most successful and best creation to date even though it was largely in part due to Lin Jie’s sacrificial method and direction.

This Sky Wolf was a true Destructive-rank, similar to himself.

It couldn’t fully reach Destructive-rank as it was still in its infancy and hadn’t fully developed its abilities yet, but as long as it continued to feed on the flesh and blood of transcendent beings, it would eventually become Wilde’s greatest assistance.

But right now, the most important thing was to make a binding pact with it and thoroughly turn it into his familiar. Wilde walked over and squatted down beside the Sky Wolf.

Placing one hand on its forehead and the other on the back of its head, Wilde used the aether to firmly suppress the Sky Wolf’s minute struggling.

However, the process was much smoother than he imagined and any anticipated danger didn’t occur.

In fact, after the initial restless stirring at the beginning, this fellow had entered an inexplicable ‘dumbed’ state.

It’s because Boss Lin is here... thought Wilde to himself as he understood why the Sky Wolf was in this state at the moment the pact was formed.

Subtle trembling, a stiff gaze, a swaying tail, and the inability to raise its claws... All this represented its fear!

This vicious dream realm predator that would terrify most others was actually cowering in fear at the sight of that young man facing it, as if it wished to flee right this instant.

Wilde shuddered as he stroked the Sky Wolf's neck to placate it. Lin Jie felt at ease seeing the old man smiling kindly as he petted the dog.

Oh... Looks like Joseph was mistaken. The reason Old Wil lingered at 52nd Avenue was to pick up this stray dog.

His purpose of joining 'Blood Feast' is to let those criminal extremists find true meaning in life and to bring them to the bookstore for chicken soup. Haa... The lonely and helpless life of this old empty nester has finally gotten better!

A pet and an ideal are just like a second youth. Old Wil must be very happy!

Lin Jie glanced at the coin in his hand and hesitated. Old Wil had found what he wanted to do and finally overcame the shadow in his heart, communicating with others and persuading them with kindness.

Stopping him now would seem like a severe blow to Old Wil's esteem...

Now that things are looking up, I can't just stop him like this.

As Lin Jie thought about all this, he saw Wilde bringing the husky over with some difficulty. The dog showed some obvious resistance as it whined continuously in a bid to retreat. Old Wil could only drag it over forcefully.

Huh? Wait a minute, Old Wil can actually go head to head in strength with such a large husky? Lin Jie's eyes widened as he watched Old Wil with renewed interest.

That's really not easy...

He's certainly old but robust. Looks like I really don't know Old Wil all that well. It's no wonder he dares to travel alone to the bookstore in the wee hours of the morning. He's still really healthy indeed.

Lin Jie's view of Old Wil had undergone a huge change. From the way he saw it, Old Wil's contact with 'Blood Feast' wasn't all that bad... Perhaps he could ask Silver if she had any way of protecting others.

Wilde pressed the dog to the floor and instructed, "Grady, stay."

Lin Jie's attention was drawn to the cute dog and he reached out to pet its head in curiosity. "That's a cute name."

Wilde nodded. Having the 'sinner of avarice' as a sacrificial offering gave the Sky Wolf an insatiable thirst for blood. Thus, the name of Grady (Greedy) was most suitable.

The originally restless husky fell silent as Lin Jie caressed its head. Its eyes turned completely dull and it sat on the ground, not moving. It even withdrew its protruding tongue and kept making a soft whimpering from its throat.

"This dog is rather well-behaved..." said Lin Jie.

While it still had the temperament of a husky and did have a scary appearance, it was actually much meeker than Lin Jie had imagined. Staring at those feeble and innocent eyes, Lin Jie rubbed its head twice more and chuckled. "Haha, this dog is really suitable for a pet. Old Wil, you have good taste."

"Ha... You really know how to crack jokes," replied Wilde cautiously. *Only you would call a Destructive-rank Sky Wolf a pet dog.*

With a wide smile, Lin Jie extended his hand. "Shake hands?"

Grady stiffly raised its paw and placed it in Lin Jie's hand, then shook it a few times. Then, Lin Jie switched hands. "This side?"

Grady didn't dare make a sound. He raised its other paw and wagged his tail.

A Sky Wolf like him had actually been reduced to a pet dog. Wilde's lips twitched and looked away, choosing to disregard Grady's imploring eyes that were begging for help. *Since Boss Lin likes you, just bear with it for a while.*

Grady: "..."

Chapter 142: Killing Three Birds With One Stone

Chapter 142: Killing Three Birds With One Stone

Lin Jie played with Old Wil's adopted husky for a while, and thought that the dog had a really gentle nature. It was also able to execute commands well, indicating that it had previously been trained.

Lin Jie had a suspicion that Grady had been raised by someone else, but something occurred, causing him to become a stray until Old Wil adopted him.

Since the extent of the bombing on 52nd Avenue was so widespread, the original owner probably suffered misfortune and wasn't able to raise Grady anymore.

Although it was a husky and one of considerable size, Grady actually seemed a good match for an older person like Old Wil. On top of that, such a large dog would definitely be able to protect Old Wil well.

Then, Lin Jie suddenly looked towards the partition wall, realizing the crunching and growling sounds had come from there.

"Were those sacrificial offerings eaten by Grady?" he blurted out.

Old Wil, how could you put meat in front of a husky...

"Yes."

Wilde smiled and nodded. "Those were originally prepared for Grady."

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow. There was no need to remind him since Old Wil already had this realization.

But Lin Jie didn't find it that odd after more thought...

Old Wil is such a thoughtful person. How could he have not prepared sufficiently before adopting Grady? He must have researched the habits of a husky before making the decision.

“That’s good... and here I’d been worried that you wouldn’t get along with your new pet, but it seems like you’ve done sufficient preparation.”

Lin Jie rubbed Grady’s head again before returning back to his seat. “ ‘Blood Feast’ isn’t that simple and you will be coming into just one aspect of it. If you are determined to go, it would be best to bring Grady with you. If need be, don’t hold onto your grudge... You can contact Joseph and ask him for help. He’s been investigating ‘Blood Feast’ with his student recently.”

From what Old Wil had told him, the ones who had invited him were “a bunch that did nothing much all that long.” Therefore, Wilde probably thought that ‘Blood Feast’ was nothing but an event hosted by a pyramid scheme organization composed of idlers.

But according to Joseph, this was a dangerous criminal organization; and from his chat with Claude earlier, the sound of screams and explosions in the background indeed indicated that this was a dangerous situation.

It showed that this organization had a cover on the surface as a guise of recruiting new members. But at its core, it was a strong and armed organization.

Old Wil was a linguist — Perhaps he was invited to the Blood Feast because of his professional identity, or maybe the organization needed an expert who could decipher codes or translate other languages. That was Lin Jie’s guess.

If that was the case, then the danger wouldn’t be as bad as he’d thought, but it would still be good to be cautious.

Wilde got Grady lie next to his feet, comforting the Sky Wolf by stroking him. After some thought, his eyes lit up. “Thank you for your reminder. I’ll be careful.”

He had come across the shadow assassin not long after he had joined Blood Feast.

Deep down, he had two guesses as to where the shadow assassin was from.

His first guess was that his manipulation of Heris which made members of White Wolf and Scarlet Cult brutally slaughter each other off. This caused the people behind the Magic Ovum Mirror to lose control and hence a shadow assassin was dispatched to kill off Wilde.

The second possibility was that someone within Blood Feast had realized he was pretending to join with a secret plan to cause the downfall of Blood Feast and had chosen to act first rather than later.

Plus, these two guesses didn't contradict one another either.

Because it could be likely that someone within Blood Feast had been manipulating this entire incident from behind the shadows.

After the Magic Ovum Mirror incident, Blood Feast had rapidly gotten active..This backed up his suspicions, but it was still merely a guess...

But now that Boss Lin had spoken, it indicated that this speculation was correct.

Boss Lin had repeatedly told him to not be reckless, and that the enemy might be stronger than he imagined. This might not be the only assassination attempt he might face, so Wilde needed to either hide his identity or be fully prepared for a confrontation.

Since Joseph was investigating Blood Feast, this meant that the Secret Rite Tower was paying quite a bit of attention to the organization and would be a good target for making use of.

What Boss Lin means to say... is that a disaster will strike. When Blood Feast is disrupted and their believers enticed, information should be passed to Secret Rite Tower so that they will deal with Blood Feast. With such a mess going on, perhaps I could take advantage of the situation

and figure out who the hidden person pulling the strings is! Thought Wilde to himself.

What a sinister strategy! Killing three birds with one stone! It's just to be expected of Boss Lin!

Wilde deeply admired Boss Lin's foresight and understanding of the overall situation. Moreover, he had entirely seen through Wilde's thoughts... His hatred of Joseph had indeed gotten out of proportion and the bookstore owner truly understood that. Even making use of Joseph would cause Wilde to subconsciously shun the idea, so Boss Lin had advised him to 'let go of the grudge'.

The black magician replied with utmost respect. "I will listen to you to bring along Grady and be very careful."

"I'm hoping I'll be able to get more customers, but even so, I wouldn't want to lose an old friend like you. I have waited for a long time to see you 'alive' once more, so don't let me see you 'die' again," Lin Jie said solemnly.

Wilde was touched, immediately responding with "Definitely not!"

"Alright alright, no need to get so serious now."

Lin Jie smiled and took out his coin again.

"I'll flip it once more to see how your luck will be like this time."

Lin Jie said it was for luck, but he still intended to manipulate the flip in order to boost Old Wil's confidence.

Wilde's heart was already numb to such surprise. The Coin of Destiny was a powerful spellcasting tool, but even Supreme-rank beings couldn't continuously activate it in such a relaxed fashion...

Typically an altar for worshiping the Goddess of Fate had to be prepared along with sincere praying to use the coin's ability. Its activation would consume a large amount of aether and the caster could easily fall into a weakened state. *How can it be just simply tossing a regular coin?!*

Could you be the actual Goddess of Fate?!

“Ah, it landed on good fortune. Seems like this undertaking will go smoothly.”

Lin Jie looked at the side with the red dot in his hand.

The two exchanged a glance and smiled. The atmosphere was harmonious and everything was understood without saying.

“Her Excellency permits an audience for you to confess.” An attendant in a long white robe said coldly.

“Thank you...” Vincent hurriedly drew a semicircle on his chest, but the attendant had already turned away, not paying him any attention.

He retracted his hand in embarrassment and gazed at the Church of the Dome chapel ahead of him.

This was the Church of the Dome’s chapel of the Seventh Parish, as well as the residence of the new Seventh Apostle. Vincent had been here only a few days ago, yet now he had returned with the reason of seeking atonement.

In the past, Vincent’s heart would gush with utmost reverence and admiration when he gazed at this place.

But now, he was filled with conflicting emotions as he gazed at the magnificent chapel with ***Sun Scripture*** still inside of his priest robes. Only the faith of the moon could exist within the church, while anything heretic was expelled and eliminated. Yet, ***Sun Scripture*** was still safe and sound.

With countless thoughts running through his mind, Vincent entered the church.

Chapter 143: Dark Moon Apostle

Chapter 143: Dark Moon Apostle

Clutching *Sun Scripture* at his chest and harboring a heart full of doubts, Vincent walked through the silent chapel as moonlight reflected through the stained glass panels all around onto his priest robes.

Because it was night, he still had a blindfold over his face to avoid gazing at the moon.

In the past, he felt that this was a necessary act of reverence to demonstrate the believer's humility as well as the price they paid for the moon's protection and power.

But now, the doubts had started to grow. Followers ought to maintain utter respect for their god, but when the true form of their god couldn't be seen, that seemed a little strange.

They believed in the moon and called out the moon's name. But... Would they know if they were truly worshiping the moon?

Vincent suppressed his sacrilegious thoughts that were sprouting like weeds in his head. Taking a deep breath, he tried to calm his mind and clear his thoughts as he walked down the long corridor to the confessional where the Seventh Apostle was situated.

The church where the Seventh Apostle was located was huge, with high domes symbolizing the greatness of the divine. Exquisite stained glass windows and magnificent white sculptures could be seen everywhere and there was a circular skylight at the very top which bathed everyone that entered in moonlight.

The main hall was in the center of the entire church and could hold more than a thousand. At the two sides were the priest quarters. The confessional of the apostle that oversees the parish was

inaccessible to ordinary folk and only priests could enter this place.

The Church of the Dome was the most widely practiced faith in Azir and also where ordinary folk would have the most contact with transcendent beings.

But in truth, an apostle would only receive transcendent beings.

The Church of the Dome consisted of the pope, saintesses, evangelists, priests, nuns, and clergymen in decreasing rank.

There was only one pope, chosen by divine right. There were two saintesses, representing the light and dark sides of the moon and were in charge of conveying the holy word.

Seven apostles with titles according to the phases of the moon each had their own respective powers — New, Waxing Crescent, Waxing Gibbous, Full, Waning Gibbous, Waning Crescent and Dark.

Vincent was in the parish of the Dark Moon Apostle.

Evangelists roamed the land, preaching the Church of the Dome's faith everywhere they went. Their job scope wasn't much different from priests, just as if they were dispatch priests.

The reason as to why evangelists were a rank higher than priests was because they were the Church of the Dome's fighters and were actually combat adept priests. Compared to priests that specialized in healing, evangelists were favored more by the upper levels. Therefore, priests were like slightly dysfunctional goods and were only sent out to teach the faith to ordinary folk.

As for nuns and clergymen, these were just transcendent beings with even lower ability. Although their numbers were great, they were basically overlooked most of the time.

Vincent placed his hand on the wooden door of the confessional, hesitated for a bit before pushing it open slowly.

Creak.

The sound of the door being opened was accentuated by the silence

of the empty corridor.

The confessional was a small, nearly airtight chamber, except for a small window at the very top, through which pale silvery moonlight shone through and lit up the red-robed apostle standing at the very front.

The newly appointed Dark Moon Apostle was a lady by the name of Vanessa. She had long, straight chestnut hair, a soft, beautiful face, and a smile that seemed to be full of constant warmth.

Like Vincent, she too was blindfolded, but that didn't diminish the calming effect she had on others around her.

This was the Dark Moon Apostle's power, 'Silent Domain'. Of course, this was just a surface effect from the spillage. When the real power was truly activated, it would be a comprehensive silencing ability, causing aether in a large area to go dormant and unable to be used. On the battlefield, this was simply a deadly weapon.

The previous Dark Moon Apostle had unfortunately died a martyr's death while fighting a dream beast invasion. Thus, the saintesses and pope had elected an evangelist to become the seventh apostle and be bestowed with power.

Vincent lowered his head and entered. With a trembling voice, he bowed. "Your Excellency, I have sinned."

Vanessa was still new to the role and this was the first time a priest had come seeking forgiveness and to repent.

However, this wasn't all that unusual. The faith of the moon was so widespread that it was not uncommon for clergy members to confess their sins to a higher authority and seek forgiveness.

"Father Vincent, how have you sinned?" Vanessa asked with a kind smile.

"Speak the truth to the Moon, repent sincerely and mend your ways with an alert mind, the Moon shall always be merciful."

Vincent knew these words very well. He had often spoken the same words to the faithful many times. But now, he did find it somewhat strange to be on the receiving end.

He got rid of these thoughts and concentrated on his acting. The bookstore owner was right. He could not show any hesitation. As a priest with complete faith in the church, he had to immediately report all of these anomalies truthfully so that nobody could suspect that anything was amiss. Vincent followed the script he had come up with. "I... I've been feeling very uneasy lately."

The smile on Vanessa's face wavered slightly. "Uneasy?"

Vincent answered timidly, "Yes, I often feel anxious, irritable, and unable to meditate. I find it difficult to breathe, and my entire body would shiver. I also frequently hear voices and see things..."

"Wait," Vanessa's slight smile still remained. "This isn't a sin, Father."

Vincent shook his head. "Please hear me out. I initially thought that it was because I've been so busy lately but it's much more serious than I thought."

After describing his symptoms in detail, he blurted out in panic. "Your Excellency, I... I've seen the moon in my hallucinations! I have sinned!"

There was a subtle change in Vanessa's expression and her eyes turned cold briefly. But she quickly returned back to her friendly and reassuring image as she comforted Vincent. "You've seen the moon? Are you certain that it's the moon that you saw?"

"I... I've never seen it before, but I've heard descriptions of it. It should be the moon and it was in the water." Vincent then asked, "Your Excellency, what should I do? Am I not pious enough..."

Still smiling, Vanessa replied, "It doesn't matter. That isn't the actual moon and it's just your imagination. You've never seen the moon before, right?"

"Don't worry about it. All you need is a good rest. You were

amongst those that received Holy Moon Essence awhile back. Use more of it if you are feeling uneasy. I'm sure you've experienced its effectiveness. If you feel that you aren't pious enough, have it guide you to the moon's protection."

Vincent acted like he had been successfully convinced and continued speaking with Vanessa for a while more before he took his leave.

Vanessa's smile vanished as she watched him leave.

"Bring me Vincent's surveillance records," she ordered coldly. "What has he been up to recently?"

An attendant suddenly appeared at the side and handed her a piece of white wax.

Vincent didn't realize that he and other clergy members that had been issued Holy Moon Essence were actually being monitored in secret via their holy emblems.

Chapter 144: Terrifying

Chapter 144: Terrifying

“Vincent’s adverse reaction to Holy Moon Essence is because he’s rather attuned to the moon, so his inspiration was elevated after continuous usage, causing him to see the true image of the Moon. This is actually quite normal.

“Since he’s come forward to report it, it’s less likely for him to have doubts. But something this big has to be dealt with caution and make sure no one has realized the anomalies he has experienced.”

Vanessa muttered as she took the white wax candle and dismissed the attendant.

With a touch of her slender hand, the candle wick was lit. Wisps of white smoke rose over the flickering flame, twisting and turning to form a curtain of white smoke.

Unbeknownst to lower ranked clergy members, the holy emblem which incorporated a part of their soul wasn’t just the best sorcery tool but also a monitoring device for the upper hierarchy.

Once baptized and issued with a holy emblem meant falling under surveillance, where every word and action wouldn’t escape the upper echelon’s monitoring.

The white wax candle in Vanessa’s hand was made with the mold used to cast the holy emblem. It was made of a special material and had a mystical resonance with the holy emblem. As long as the candle was lit, Vanessa could see all that was experienced by the one monitored... Just from the view of the holy emblem.

Therefore, holy emblems were required to be worn on the chest or held most of the time.

Vanessa chanted the incantation, and a faint, wavering scene appeared on the smoke curtain.

In contrast to the finely decorated church and the masses of worshipers, the current view only showed a man's hand resting on a single worshiper. Vincent's gentle voice could be heard reciting a prayer.

Then, there were scenes of Vincent traveling a long dusty path to visit the Dark Moon Apostle Vanessa at this church, followed by scenes of various exorcisms.

These were all scenes of daily business Vincent usually undertook at his small parish chapel and weren't of much use.

Vanessa's heart suddenly skipped a beat as the scene changed to the last text message sent by audio-visual store boss Colin, requesting an exorcism.

Then came a scene of a long journey before Father Vincent arrived at the audio-visual store. After a night of mediation and doubting his own state, he eventually headed to the bookstore to complete the task.

A few snippets of a rundown bookstore had appeared at this point, but everything was still perfectly normal.

Moreover, this bookstore couldn't be any more ordinary. It was just a simple and unassuming bookstore.

Vanessa frowned, then loosened her brows as she thought to herself, *Perhaps I'm overthinking it. It's possibly just a physical reaction from Vincent absorbing too much Holy Moon Essence too quickly, causing his inspiration to overflow and resulting in the current situation.*

Letting him use it a few more times over a long period of time should balance it out...

As she mused, the scene changed into the inside of the bookstore.

The first thing she saw was the bookstore's old wooden floor. As the vision panned up, the scene revealed a counter with stools as well as the bookstore owner seated behind the counter.

Vanessa gasped.

She blinked several times to make sure she wasn't seeing things.

The person seated behind the counter... No, that's no person!

The one in the seated posture was clearly an unidentified black silhouette with the outline of a human!

A chill went down Vanessa's spine as she recoiled backwards. Her heart pounded frantically and her temples throbbed as she stared fixedly at the scene.

What exactly... is going on?!

Vincent appeared to not sense anything amiss and went over to that dark shadow to start a conversation. In just a moment, his identity as a priest was seen through and he was forcefully made to interact with the stone gargoyle and Seed of Desire as a warning.

Indeed, this seemingly ordinary bookstore was more like a demon's nest, with such powerful and monstrous objects and species lying in plain sight.

Vincent could clearly determine what these things were and had cried out from fear. However, he still wasn't able to realize that the most terrifying thing was actually right in front of him.

Vanessa's heart was in her mouth when the shadowy figure grabbed Vincent's wrist and got closer.

As the image of the shadowy being got closer in her field of vision, Vanessa could see that this darkness was like an endless abyss, stirring restly for all eternity. She was vaguely able to see millions of eyes flickering within, like the stars in the night sky. There were also squirming tentacles huddled together, coiling and ready to rush out from that humanoid vessel at any moment.

No, no!

I will die!

I can't just sit here and die!

Must resist!

Vanessa screamed in her heart, convinced that it was some sort of illusion spell as she struggled to activate 'Silent Domain' in a bid to freeze all aether in the surroundings.

However, as soon as she activated her power, all eyes were fixed on her. Formless tentacles that were both slippery and sticky, tightened around her ankles and neck, making her feel suffocated.

Vanessa's body felt cold and she stiffened up, not daring to move.

The stone gargoyle and Seed of Desire on the counter-top were nothing in comparison, but just those two items had nearly scared Vincent to death.

In the vision, Vincent was still talking with that humanoid silhouette.

The words they exchanged were distorted by an invisible force and accompanied by a shrill cacophony of voices, but it seemed as if Vincent had become visibly agitated after learning something.

Eventually, a book was handed to Vincent.

Vanessa's eyes were drawn to the book. But just as she was about to get a glimpse of the title, the shackles around her body suddenly disappeared as her power activated, extinguishing the candle and immediately cutting off the vision.

'Silent Domain' had expanded, causing the stimulated aether in the surroundings to calm down and everything became quiet.

Only the ragged breathing of Vanessa could be heard.

Face ashen, Vanessa wondered, *What was that? A dream beast, monster, or... heresy in the form of an evil god?!*

After a long while, Vanessa's conviction towards the moon took hold once again. She closed her eyes for a moment to calm her wavering mind down.

Regardless of what it is, this Vincent fellow must surely be on to something. He was specially tasked to come over and sound me out. And that book makes me uneasy. I have to do something...

A cold glint flashed across Vanessa's eyes as she summoned the attendant.

The attendant knelt to the ground respectfully.

She reached out and stroked the attendant's hair with a smile so warm and infectious. "Go, Hyman, kill him and bring me the book. Make sure there are no flaws and don't leave any traces. Just like last time."

Vanessa's beautiful face reflected in the attendant's mesmerized eyes as he bent down slowly and kissed Vanessa's instep.

"I will do as you wish. It is my honor and life's mission to serve you well," said the attendant with a look of rapt fervor.

Vanessa nodded and watched the attendant leave. She then went to the basin of water in the corner of the confessional. Dipping her fingers inside, she drew a circle and in the midst of the ripples, an image of an elderly man in lavish gold robes praying appeared.

The elderly man opened his eyes. "What's the matter, Seventh Apostle?"

"Your Holiness, I have an unusual report..."

Chapter 145: Self-Immolation

Chapter 145: Self-Immolation

“Huu...”

Vincent exhaled sharply as he emerged from the confessional and used ‘Eyes of the Moon’ to view the long narrow corridor.

Judging from Vanessa’s reaction, he probably hadn’t messed up...

This newly appointed Seventh Apostle was not as gentle and amicable as she came off. A part of it was due to her ‘Silent Domain’ power, while the rest was a deliberate show towards her subordinates and followers.

Vincent’s assumption wasn’t without basis. Even within the Church of the Dome, there was no shortage of gossip so Vincent had heard about this Apostle’s temperament before she even became a candidate.

— Every apostle would prepare their own successor in advance. Vanessa had been the previous Dark Moon Apostle’s assistant and aide, helping with running the Seventh Parish. When the previous Dark Moon Apostle passed, she assumed the position naturally. Thus, most priests and clergy of this parish knew her.

Vanessa’s character could be described as harsh. She was basically someone who had to seek revenge for the slightest grievance, with swift, decisive action and zero tolerance.

If Vanessa had discovered the sacrilegious thoughts and doubts Vincent had, she would have probably gotten her subordinates to seal off the confessional and call in the church’s evangelists to silence him to prevent word about there being a problem with the Holy Moon Essence from leaking out.

And now, Vanessa hadn’t done anything like that. She had instead comforted Vincent and asked him to use Holy Moon Essence more.

This meant that she hadn't noticed Vincent's little feelers and had been successfully duped into thinking that he had come in to make a report because he was scared.

But at the same time, this basically meant that there really was a problem with Holy Moon Essence... There were certainly a few others having similar questions like him and Vanessa's reaction was well practiced.

While replying to Vincent, 'Silent Domain' had been activated as she attempted to use her power to make Vincent 'obey.'

However, she didn't know that when her power came into contact with Vincent, the priest fell into a momentarily daze, but then he felt Sun Scripture in his arms absorbing the aether fluctuations from Vanessa and allowed him to regain his senses.

Vincent's heart sank.

Looks like the bookstore owner is right. Perhaps they have deceived us for far too long... However, Vincent couldn't bear to part with his past and was still struggling to come to terms with the crumbling of the faith he had all his life.

His heart was filled with uncertainty. Should he tell everyone the truth? Did he have the ability to do so? And would he have the strength to bear the consequences?

Vincent was thoroughly confused and didn't know what to do next. Thus, he chose to stay at the priests quarters at the sides of the church to mull over it.

On this night, he tossed and turned with worry before finally falling asleep from exhaustion.

In his sleep, Vincent had a hazy inkling that he had stepped into a strangely beautiful dream.

The velvety night sky full of stars was reflected on the tranquil lake beneath Vincent's feet. And in front of him stood a faceless girl in a black dress with a miniature sun and moon suspended above her hands.

For some reason, this young girl seemed familiar, as if he had seen her before somewhere...

However, Vincent's attention was drawn to the miniature sun and moon.

The sun was like a dazzling ball of fire full of high energy explosions and surging power that was suffocating.

On the contrary, the moon was peaceful and calm, exuding a faint luster that was calming to the soul.

Most importantly, they each had their own respective vitality, which gave off a feeling of constant growth.

It was a far cry from the stillness of the pale moon's divine power that Vincent was used to feeling!

It would still be fine if there wasn't a comparison. But when there was, the moon's divine power that Vincent used to feel was a sort of cold and damp, as if he was covered in moss that made him feel disgusted.

"Chosen One, you have finally come," said the young girl.

Vincent was slightly stunned. This scene was already magical, but the words 'chosen one' struck him like a hammer blow.

The only thing where he could consider himself to be chosen was having been recommended ***Sun Scripture*** by the bookstore owner.

Vincent didn't know whether he was imagining things, but the manner in which the young girl spoke seemed a little stiff, as if she had just learned her lines and wasn't yet proficient.

However, Vincent was no longer capable of paying heed to these minor details. "Who are you? Where are we? What are you trying to do?" Vincent exclaimed in slight panic.

The young girl answered, "You don't need to know my name for the time being. This is my dream, my domain. I dragged you in because we share a common enemy... Use your heart, and you will know

the answer.”

A common enemy, that can only be... the moon!

There were two moons. The one the Church of the Dome believed in, and the one before him now. One was real, and one was false.

Could this young girl be the true Goddess of the Moon?!

Vincent’s gut and instincts told him so. His eyes were completely drawn to the sun in the young girl’s hand as he started to get overwhelmed by an intense desire.

I want... I want it... Give it to me!

Vincent’s hand had already reached out as these thoughts came into his mind. His fingers first touched the sun, feeling the scorching heat before he slowly placed his entire palm on it.

The young girl’s gaze remained insipid as she reminded Vincent, “Remember, there’s no turning back.”

He understood that this was something very dangerous, but... He couldn’t control himself! His body was being forcefully compelled to take the sun.

Boom...

The scorching heat spread from his fingertips to his entire body, then exploded with warmth and the dazzling white light in his vision expanded more and more till it engulfed everything.

Vincent felt like he had become a sun, radiating endless light and heat.

—

Hyman followed Vincent in secret and came to his room in the priest quarters.

To be on the safe side, he first hid for quite some time, waiting till Vincent had fallen asleep. Only then did he appear, and he drew a

poisoned dagger from his sleeves.

He concealed himself, stealthily making his way to the fast asleep priest. Then with a cold venomous gleam in his eyes, he raised the dagger.

For Her Excellency. For the Church. For the great Moon!

This was what Hyman told himself each time he acted.

But this time, just as he was about to stab down his dagger, Sun Scripture in Vincent's arms suddenly burst into flames!

Hyman had no time to react as the moon's divine power throughout his body was instantly ignited, transforming into an unimaginable heat, burning his flesh along with his clothing.

Boom!

“ARGHHHH!!!”

His dagger fell to the ground with a clang as he screamed from the intense pain. He was like a torch, burning up in twisted flames, making him appear like a visitor from hell.

—

Vincent woke up with a start and opened his eyes. The first thing he saw was a completely charred corpse followed by a red sea of flames all around him.

Rumble...

The roof started to collapse as Vincent leaped up from bed, recognizing the charred bits of clothing remaining was from the attendant waiting outside the Dark Moon Apostle's door.

“An attack!! An attack!!”

A loud shot came from outside, followed by the sounds of hurried footsteps that got closer and closer.

Chapter 146: Praise The Sun!

Chapter 146: Praise The Sun!

A sudden fire, the charred corpse of the Dark Moon Apostle's attendant, and the shouts from clergy members outside.

Vincent was a victim of the church's plot and had reported the anomaly to his superiors. Moreover, he had the heretical Sun Scripture in his possession which had caused this disaster and death.

What should he do in this sort of situation?

Run, of course!!!

After a moment of panic, Vincent calmed down in an instant and decisively leaped out of the room window to escape as clergy members rushed over.

He was the only one present besides the attendant at the scene. Now, one was dead and there was a dagger lying on the ground. Anybody that came across the aftermath would visualize the most likely scenario.

Vincent too had already realized the reason for the attendant appearing there — Vanessa must have guessed something, or had dispatched the attendant to kill him, due to the amount of uncertainty regarding his situation.

Thus, it was clear which side Vanessa would lean towards. Only death awaited Vincent if he was caught!

His only remaining alternative was to flee!

Bang!

“Where did he go? ...He's escaped!”

Vincent flew out of the window, landing in an awkward roll. As he

staggered away from the sea of flames, he heard the crash of the door being broken down followed by the metallic chink of armor.

Glancing back, Vincent saw that the entire room had collapsed and at least a dozen sword-wielding evangelists clad in silver armor stood outside the door.

The lead evangelist glared icily at the burning room and the charred remains of the corpse before meeting Vincent's gaze. He then raised his sword and barked out, "Attendant Hyman has been killed. The murder and arsonist is there, the apostate Father Vincent! After him!

"Split up and flank him. Inform all clergy members of the Seventh Parish and the Inquisition Office to seal off the area!"

Goddamn it! They are after me!

Vincent scrambled away, giving himself various magical augmentations as he silently cursed Vanessa's vicious methods.

All would have been well if Hyman succeeded. After all, Vincent was just an ordinary priest with neither status nor power. Such a person dying during an unfortunate exorcism wouldn't be out of the ordinary.

The Dark Moon Apostle Vanessa had a thousand and one ways to conceal the truth and make everyone forget him completely.

Furthermore, she might perhaps have the entire church behind her!

If Hyman failed and was slain, she would immediately turn the tables and get the evangelists to slay him on the spot for the crime of heresy.

Therefore, no matter what Vincent did, his eventual outcome was death. It was hard to imagine that Vanessa had come up with such a foolproof plan to crush him as if he were a mere ant.

Perhaps the only thing Vanessa hadn't taken into account was the still-glowing ***Sun Scripture*** in Vincent's hands.

The bookstore owner told me to report to him if I discover anything amiss... Right, that girl in the dream seemed a little like his assistant in the bookstore. Could it be... Could it be this was all in his calculations and is all part of his plan?!

Don't tell me that the dream where the sun was put in my hands indicated the power of Sun Scripture? It was this power that saved me from Hyman's dagger and caused this fire!

Vicent tripped then scrambled back to his feet, aware that he had either become a fortunate or unfortunate pawn in this chess game played by great beings.

Vanessa had easily grasped what he was up to, yet after everything that had just happened, it seemed that the bookstore owner had already accounted for all of Vanessa's moves.

"No, perhaps he has already seen through the Church's motive..."

Clutching **Sun Scripture** nervously, Vincent eyed the surging sea of flames before him. The shouts and chinking of armor filled him with a sense of danger and tension, making his heart pound wildly.

The strength of an evangelist far surpassed his own. If it wasn't for the raging flames holding them back, Vincent wouldn't have been able to get away.

It was Sun Scripture in his arms that continuously radiated heat and boundless power, making the sea of flames around Vincent part so that he could pass through smoothly.

The flames were the evangelists' greatest obstacle, but they didn't impede Vincent in any way.

However, the evangelists had surrounded him and their encirclement was getting smaller by the minute. If Vincent had no way of breaking through, he would ultimately be caught and put to death for heresy!

Vincent, who had only been an ordinary priest before, had never witnessed anything like this and could only grit his teeth and flee. But now, his legs had gone soft and his entire body was shaking.

There were over a hundred evangelists ranging from Abnormal- to Pandemonium-rank in the Seventh Parish. Just any one of them alone could easily kill Vincent ten times over and the Inquisition Office was an even scarier existence.

Right now, the whole Seventh Parish had been sealed off and all members of the clergy were out to kill him.

This is surely a dead end...

Vincent's vision faded and he swayed for a moment. Then, he stared at ***Sun Scripture*** .

The thick and heavy book emitted an intense glow, forming a golden sphere that flickered continuously as though some great power was brewing up a massive storm.

Open it... Open it!

A voice was calling out from somewhere. Vincent took a deep breath and smiled bitterly. He had no other choice.

Breathing deeply, he put his hand on the cover of the book and slowly opened it up.

At the very same moment, the evangelists broke through the wall of fire and surrounded him. In formation, they raised their weapons and pointed at him. The lead evangelist raised his right hand and brought it down without hesitation. "Kill him!"

Weapons and magic were unleashed.

Vincent flipped open Sun Scripture and light burst out. The pages turned on their own even though there was no wind, and strange golden letters flew from the page and floated up around him as the power within the book flowed into his body.

Time seemed to have stood still.

"Arghhh!"

Vincent felt his entire body was burning. His skin and flesh seemed

to turn into scorched earth and his blood into lava. His eyes burned with unbearable pain and his body was like a volcano about to erupt but with no means to channel it out. Under this continuous suppression, he remembered the sun he had grasped tightly in his dream.

The moment he thought about it, Vincent felt his hand heating up and raised it for a closer look. There was indeed a small sun-like ball of fire in his palm. Twisted light and flames poured out of his hand, making the fire ball even bigger.

Vincent relaxed, feeling like he had found a breakthrough.

All the power surged into the 'sun' within his hand and it got bigger and bigger...

The evangelists watched in astonishment as the sun-like fireball swelled from the center of the heretic's outstretched hands and surging with terrifying power.

One meter, three meters, ten meters...

The brilliant shining sun exceeded the height of a three-story building and lit up the entire night sky!

Abnormal-rank, Pandemonium-rank... Up till Destructive-rank!

Clank, clank...

The evangelists dropped their weapons to the ground and some started to cower and retreat.

Floating in midair, Vincent was completely blinded by the incandescent white light. Parts of his skin had cracked and light came through the gaps, emitting tremendous heat.

He gazed up at the ball of fire, feeling a sudden warmth and relief. With a hoarse voice, he shouted out, "Praise... The Sun!"

As if in response to his call, the giant sun contracted suddenly, then unleashing immeasurable light and heat that engulfed everything!

“Arghhh!!!!”

The lead evangelist was the first amongst them to be bathed in the red light and was instantly reduced to ashes mid-scream.

Following that, the spherical field of fire and heat expanded in all directions like a tsunami, destroying and flattening everything that it touched.

“That’s how it is. I suspect that the bookstore is a heretic’s stronghold and he has discovered how Holy Moon Essence works and wishes to use it to shake the faith in the Moon...”

“Understood. Continue to pay attention to him. This bookstore isn’t as simple as it seems and we need to plan for the long term. Remember, caution is of utmost importance.”

“Yes.”

Vanessa bowed respectfully. After the image in the water mirror disappeared, she received a report from an attendant that Hyman’s assassination had failed and that Vincent seemed to have some sort of hidden ability.

However, she didn’t place too much concern on the fire and explosion. In her opinion, an Abnormal-rank priest being able to kill Hyman was already the limit so there wasn’t much to worry about.

Vanessa sat on her seat in the confessional, propping up her head in her hands, waiting for news from the evangelists.

Rumble...

The entire building started to shake and Vanessa stood up in alarm, sensing a wave of Destructive-rank force. A glaring red light shone through all the windows of the church as they shattered one by one before a huge force broke down the walls and pillars, as fire and light covered her field of vision.

“What’s going on?!”

Vanessa's face darkened. She immediately activated her power to calm the surrounding aether down, but the furious aetheric power was rampant like a riderless horse. Moreover, its extent was so vast that Vanessa could only form a completely still space around her to withstand that horrific power.

She gritted her teeth as she held up, but there was a sudden, second wave of light. The hastily put-up 'Silent Domain' was broken by a stream of hot flames which enveloped Vanessa, causing her to lose consciousness.

The earthshaking rumble only came after.

Rumble... Boom!!

The Seventh Parish Church was leveled!

Chapter 147: Silver Placenta

Chapter 147: Silver Placenta

“To think that it is actually a heretic evil god that is truly in control of the bookstore on 23rd Avenue... But only the Moon is truly divine in this world. All else are but impostors dwelling in the dream realms. But according to Vanessa’s account, the power of this evil god can’t be overlooked and must be destroyed.”

The scene was cut and the image of a bowing Vanessa disappeared from the surface of the water.

The old man in gorgeous golden robes gazed away from the holy pool and stood up with a solemn look on his face. His three-meter-long golden scepter touched the ground, making a dull thud.

Bias Rodney, current pope of the Church of the Dome, and one of the few Supreme-rank transcendent beings in Norzin!

The scepter he wielded was a symbol of his papacy, and the two golden loops adorned near the top of the scepter represented the twin saintess of dark and light.

Above the two loops, lunar ornaments, representing the seven apostles, were arranged on the loops. At the very tip where the top rings touched was the full moon.

The new moon, waxing crescent, and waxing gibbous were on the right side of the outer loop, while the waning crescent, waning gibbous, and dark moon were on the left of the inner loop.

This scepter could use all the powers of the apostles and saintesses, or rather, these powers were bestowed upon them by the pope and could be withdrawn at any time.

The elderly pope walked to the center of the church, where moonlight shone through a circular hole in the huge domed roof, illuminating the sacred artifact atop a stone platform — Silver

Placenta.

According to legend, it was said to be a remnant from when the first saintess gave birth to the 'Moon'.

There were two other sacred artifacts, 'Ancient Ring' and 'Sleeping Moon Child', that were enshrined in this church. Sculptures of all former popes stood tall in niches all around, inspiring awe and solemnness.

"An evil god needs to establish a faith..." Rodney muttered to himself with a twinkle in his eyes.

"That means to say, the apparent bookstore owner by the name Lin Jie is frequently in contact with the various factions with a secret agenda of cultivating followers, building strength, biding time to establish a new sect, and will attempt to steal the church's foundation by means of Holy Moon Essence.

"At the same time, this means that the evil good isn't strong enough yet, so it doesn't dare reveal its true identity and must remain hidden, lest it gets discovered and slain in the cradle.

"Unfortunately, he never imagined Vincent's holy emblem would become his downfall..."

Rodney smiled and reached out to gently caress the 'Silver Placenta' enshrined on the stone platform. "The effect has already solidified on the first batch of Holy Moon Essence users and they will become the Moon's most fervent of believers... even death won't faze them.

"Just wait a little longer, just a bit more and we can start attempting. You will soon be able to descend from the dream realm without fear of the ugly gazes of people in this world."

The pope's gaze was kind yet fervent, as if the strangely-shaped 'Silver Placenta' was his own child.

The placental object wiggled ever so slightly.

As if it was a truly living organism...

Suddenly, Rodney's brows creased as he hurriedly turned towards the side and saw a faint white light in the distance through the rose-stained church windows.

With a sense of foreboding, Rodney squinted and saw that this ray of light came from the extreme end of the horizon. And at the very center of it was an especially brilliant spot of light, shining like the morning sun.

But it was clearly the middle of the night!

"That direction... That's the direction of the Seventh Parish. What happened to Vanessa?"

Rodney had just spoken when he heard what seemed like the sound of metal melting.

Pshh...

Rodney turned to his scepter and saw the lowest lunar ornament inner left ring, which represented the Dark Moon, had started to melt on its own!

The metal turned into a golden liquid that fell, drop by drop. But even before these droplets hit the ground, they seemed to evaporate into nothingness from the high temperature!

In the blink of an eye, the Dark Moon ornament had disappeared!

"How?!"

Rodney's expression turned ugly. This lunar ornament wasn't more than symbolic. It was a true power crystal.

Even if Vanessa died, the power should return and not disappear.

This current situation didn't just represent Vanessa's death but it also meant that that the other side's power was several times higher and had thoroughly annihilated the Dark Moon Apostle's power right to the core!

Rodney pressed his hand to the gash on the scepter and

immediately retracted from the heat.

Glancing at his own trembling hand, Rodney realized that the intense heat was just superficial. What was burning... was the Moon's divine power!

"Your Holiness, the Seventh Parish has been attacked. A massive explosion suspected to have been caused by Vincent rocked the church. 233 members of the clergy including Vanessa have been confirmed to have perished. All the other parishes have been informed and Vincent's status has been raised to the highest wanted level."

A beautiful lady in white nun robes silently appeared at the corner of the chapel and bowed to Rodney.

She was none other than Sheryl, one of the two saintesses.

Rodney took a deep breath, staring at the wound on his palm. "That means that Vincent has escaped, right?"

Sheryl lowered her head even more. "Yes."

Rodney's gaze was stern but his smile was still kind. "I remember that he was a good child and on great terms with the priest that baptized him.

"Oh right, I remember that old priest. Doesn't he live at the Seventh Parish's Chapel of Charity? Get Waning Crescent pay him a visit to express our sympathies."

The Sixth Apostle, Waning Crescent Buck, was in charge of inquisition and possessed the ability 'Heresy Trial'.

If Vincent didn't choose to seek out the old priest in his panic, then the old priest would be used as a threat. And if Vincent did seek him out, then he would just be an easy target.

Sheryl nodded and backed away into the shadows.

“Huff... Huff... Finally... Made it...”

Vincent staggered, gasping for breath as he banged against the door and slid down, leaving a trail of blood.

He was currently in a miserable state, with blackened wounds covering his entire face and body. His eyes were bloody and his tattered priest robes were soaked with blood.

The power of Sun Scripture hadn't just leveled the entire Seventh Parish. It had also burned out all of the Moon's divine power within his body and expelled it, modifying his body in a way that Vincent couldn't understand either.

But one thing was certain. Before he could find out the results, he would first have to endure the intense pain of his entire body being torn apart.

After fleeing the Seventh Parish Church, he knew that the church's first reaction would be to blockade all areas, then put out a warrant for his arrest.

He was seriously hurt at the moment and had no way of escaping to the bookstore, for it was too far away.

He had nowhere to go... Except for one other place.

Vincent looked up at the wooden signboard above the door that said 'Chapel of Charity'. This was a small church of the Church of the Dome located in a slum, with only one old priest and two clergymen. It was a small place with few people.

This was where he was baptized when he joined the Church of the Dome.

Chapter 148: Old Priest

Chapter 148: Old Priest

Vincent had grown up in the Church of the Dome. His childhood was spent in a church-funded orphanage, and like many of his peers, he went on to become a member of the clergy in service of the church.

In his youth, after he received his baptism and became an official priest, Vincent had worked at the Chapel of Charity, helping the poor and living a simple life with the elder priest.

The old priest's name was Terrence, an ordinary yet great man in the eyes of Vincent for his selflessness in providing medical treatment for the poor.

Even though Terrence's standards of divine arts was considered a bottom tier Abnormal-rank, his medical skills were highly consummate.

The Chapel of Charity was a wooden structure rarely seen amongst chapels, for they were poor. Basically, it was just an ordinary wooden cabin, suffering from leaky roofs and moth infestations. The place was as dilapidated as it seemed and the living conditions here were sometimes even worse than what the poor folk who came had.

However, Terrence didn't let this discourage him and would often spur on the clergy members under him by saying stuff like "It's our responsibility to help others" and "With the Moon watching over us, gratitude is the best form of reward."

While some may be inspired at first, over time most clergy members here would gradually be unable to endure the intolerable conditions and chose to be transferred to another chapel.

Even Vincent who had been with the old priest the longest had done so as well. However, he did have the ability to leave and bless even more believers.

The old priest had a great impact on Vincent's childhood. So, when Vincent performed his own priest duties, he would always do the best he could, unlike other colleagues that would shun or avoid their duties. Therefore, Vincent was well-loved by the faithful and gained quite a reputation in the Seventh Parish.

If there was any one place in the world where Vincent would feel absolutely at ease, it would be this tiny Chapel of Charity.

Perhaps the old priest Terrence might not believe Vincent, but he would definitely protect him.

I'll hide for a night and leave immediately. No, just till I've healed enough to be able to move freely. I mustn't implicate Father Terrence, but I have to tell him about the Holy Moon Essence to keep him on his toes so that he wouldn't be controlled...

Vincent leaned against the door, panting. Shouts and hurried knocking were heard in the distance as people were woken up and the lights of houses turned on in succession.

Vincent's heart sank. As a priest, he knew that there were orders issued to deal with the crime of heresy. The parish was sealed, and people were being informed of the situation.

These sounds were from miles away, but it was as if the voices were coming from beside Vincent.

Vincent understood that his body was completely different now as he touched his eye that was still burning with pain.

Though his vision was dark, he could tell where the lights were being turned on.

No one understood the power of the Church of the Dome like he did... And now, he was fighting against such a colossal behemoth.

The sound of chains being unfastened came from behind the door. Even though the slums were so bad that the church didn't have anything worth coveting, it still had to be locked up properly.

Creak—

The door opened and Terrence came out while hastily putting on his shoddy priest robes. He was startled to see a black figure lying by the door.

“Who... Vincent?!”

The old priest recognized the child whom he had guided. Then, he noticed the blood, wounds, and the two gaping holes in his face where eyes used to be.

“Vincent, what happened to you?!”

“Did you encounter a dream beast, malignant spirit, or did an exorcism fail? Or did you come across that heretic that caused the entire parish to be put on lock-down?!”

The old priest helped Vincent up hurriedly and moved him into the church, laying him down on a long bench.

The old priest had vast experience with medical treatment and immediately brought out a first aid kit which he used to tend to Vincent’s injuries, combining the treatment with some divine power.

But very quickly, he realized something was amiss.

The wounds on Vincent’s body were healing at a rapid rate that could be seen with the naked eyes. Divine power merely hastened this progress as bone and flesh grew, interweaving together and forming a visually frightening effect.

However, the charred and blackened wounds crusted and hardened like parched earth, and a faint red-gold light glowed faintly from all the cracks, lighting up and going out in a slow cycle.

It was as if every organ in his body had come alive and was steadily breathing...

Terence backed away and knocked over the first-aid case. “Vincent, my child. What... What is going on?”

This was definitely not how a believer of the moon was supposed to

be like. The moon had always been dark, tranquil, and mysterious. It definitely wouldn't have such explosive representation.

He recalled the shouts from outside about a heretic apparent on the loose a while ago and an unbelievable conjecture came into his mind.

The small chapel fell into silence. Outside, people had already started to gather and some were knocking on the chapel doors.

Terrence had unlocked the door earlier. All he had to do was give the word and the people outside would start pouring in.

In this silence, Vincent could sense the old priest's gaze.

Perhaps it was fear, or maybe it was disappointment...

He opened his mouth, but his throat was parched and he was suddenly afraid to tell the truth.

The old priest had lived his whole life doing good because of his staunch faith. He firmly believed that the moon would bring peace and harmony to people. He was committed to spreading the gospel of the moon, getting the common folk to believe, and having the moon wash away their inner sins so that... the world would be a better place.

If the old priest believed Vincent, it would negate the meaning of everything he had done before.

"I'm sorry..."

Vincent got down from the bench and knelt before the old priest. With his head bowed, he choked up. "I have failed your expectations of me and betrayed the Moon. The apostate heretic wanted by the Church... is me."

Terrence nearly fainted. With a trembling, angry, and despondent stare, he took a few deep breaths and slapped Vincent's shoulder.

"Do you expect me to cover up for your crimes, as I covered for your mischief in the past?!"

“I am a believer of the Moon!”

Vincent lowered his head further, allowing the old priest to shove him more.

“Remember! This... This is the last time.”

Terrence grabbed Vincent by the collar angrily, seeming as if he had aged 10 years. Looking into Vincent’s empty eye sockets, Terrence pushed him towards the prayer room with frustration.

“Go in! Hide!

“If you are discovered, I will give you up right away!”

Vincent had long known that the old priest would help him, but he couldn’t feel glad. He turned back and said, “I will leave very soon, but there’s something I have to tell you...”

Shiing!

There was a flash of dark light, and the color of blood covered Vincent’s field of vision.

Vincent’s gaze froze momentarily as blood splattered on his face. Wisps of hot air rose from the gashing wound on his chest.

The Waning Crescent Apostle Buck floated in midair, a black mask covering his face, revealing only the icy cold eyes of his. With the massive black scythe in his hands, he looked just like a grim reaper coming to claim a soul as chains went up, sealing up the entire room.

The old priest’s head rolled into the corner, streaks of tears still fresh from his dim, sad eyes.

Chapter 149: Another Gas Explosion?!

Chapter 149: Another Gas Explosion?!

Waning Crescent Buck was one of the only two Destructive-ranks amongst the seven apostles. He was also the oldest surviving apostle and head of the Inquisition Office. Cruel and indifferent, Buck was also known as the 'Reaper of Life' and 'Envoy of Death'.

However many more people gave him the nickname 'Dead Kingdom', because it was rumored that tens of thousands of people had died to his scythe, many transcendent beings included.

There were also countless apostates and heretics that were brutally executed by the Inquisition Office. If all these people could be somehow resurrected, their numbers would be sufficient to fill a kingdom, and that was where Buck's nickname came from.

On top of that, Buck was in black robes all year round, complemented with a black skeletal mask and a massive scythe for his weapon. It was as if he was the real Death, reaping life after life, which added on to his mysterious and blood-curdling image.

Buck was a faithful apostle and immediately left the Inquisition Office once he received the pope's orders and went as quickly as he could to the Chapel of Charity.

There were merely two options for his mission. First, if Vincent didn't arrive at the chapel, Buck was to capture Terrence to use as a hostage.

Second, if Vincent did arrive at the chapel, Buck was to lie in wait and get rid of that apostate who posed a huge threat to the Church of the Dome.

In the event of the second circumstance, it didn't matter if Terrence lived or not. Or rather, in Buck's eyes, an old priest not much

different from an ordinary person was insignificant.

The only reason Terrence died was because he had been standing in front of Vincent when the attack was launched.

That was all to it.

Buck raised his scythe, and the Moon's divine power wrapped around the blade like a dark black flame. The air rippled around it, forming a luminous arc, demonstrating its sharpness.

Without any reservations, Buck prepared the second strike.

He knew that the first strike had almost cut Vincent in two. Given the level of Vincent's ability to manipulate aether as well as the strength of his physical body, the priest was probably already on the verge of death.

However, Buck still chose to go about it prudently and ensure a thorough elimination of the enemy.

Buck was no rash fellow. He had already gone through the reports prior to arriving here and analyzed the current strength of the apostate known as Vincent.

He had used some unknown means to launch a devastating attack that leveled the Seventh Parish Church and killed Vanessa, but the new Dark Moon Apostle that had recently taken office was only a Pandemonium-rank.

Moreover, her 'Silent Domain' was a completely auxiliary ability. Her own combat prowess was rather low, and her being killed didn't seem that much of a surprise.

And from what Buck saw just now, Vincent seemed to be in a bad state, which meant that he was suffering from the side effects of using that secret means.

Even if Vincent did possess Destructive-rank strength, he was just a new Destructive-rank that had just been pushed up by that secret means. However, Buck was at peak of Destructive-rank, and he simply didn't need to fear this.

Buck never revealed any of these thoughts. His eyes behind the black skeletal mask were completely devoid of emotion as he raised the scythe high and brought it in a downward sweep.

The extinguishing, deathly and dark power of the Moon's divinity came gushing like a torrent full of killing intent. Everything it touched would be 'killed' from the core and even space wasn't spared, for it was disassembled and warped, forming a spiraling black hole in the middle of the church.

At the same time 'Heresy Trial' was activated, the shadow of a waning crescent appeared behind Buck.

There was another reason why Pope Rodney had sent the Waning Crescent Apostle. And that was Buck's ability governed by the aspect of 'law' and carried the Will of the Moon. Even if the opponent's power also had an aspect of a similar 'law', it still wouldn't be enough.

As its name suggested, 'Heresy Trial' could determine whether the opponent was a believer of the Moon. As long as his power was beneath Buck's, this ability could do an instant kill!

The opponent was already an apostate and no longer a believer in the Moon. Therefore, this was the perfect ability to deal with Vincent!

"It is your honor to die by the light of the Moon!"

Buck pronounced Vincent's demise from his perch.

In a brief moment, Buck's scythe was almost at Vincent's neck, and in the next, he saw Vincent slowly reach out his hand and grab the scythe's blade.

Vincent's hand was covered with blood and charred scabs. The force of his parry caused them to break off, revealing the molten-like flesh beneath that was like bubbling lava glowing red and gold.

Sizzle...

The tremendous heat from Vincent's fingers caused a palm-shaped

dent in the scythe blade and it melted so quickly that the edges glowed red and heat waves rose from it.

And Vincent's body had once again reignited as he pressed towards Buck.

“How?!”

Buck's pupils shrank as the heat coming from the scythe and the power displayed far exceeded his imagination. However, he didn't panic and immediately twisted the scythe in an attempt to behead Vincent with the curved track of his weapon.

Vincent raised his head and made no attempt to dodge. His other hand reached out and pressed against Buck's face.

Krrackk!

An immense force crushed his mask instantly!

A look of horror washed over Buck's pale face as the fiery and ghostly figure of Vincent reflected in his pupils.

It was at this moment where he realized a mortifying fact — His ability had no effect!

“Surprised? Do you know why your power is useless?”

Vincent croaked hoarsely, then laughed. “It's because the Moon's light is merely the afterglow of the Sun.”

Buck's eyes widened in shock as his entire knowledge was shattered by these words. Fear and disbelief overwhelmed him, causing him to shudder violently.

He felt an intense, powerful and burning force pass from Vincent's palm into his body. And just like a lighted match thrown into a pool of kerosene, the Moon's divine power within him combusted instantaneously.

What killed him was his belief in the Moon!

Boom!

“Aargghhh!”

Flames burst out violently from Buck’s body and in the blink of an eye, all the Moon’s divine power in his body as well as the black hole formed from this power exploded.

A Destructive-rank was blown up in an instant. No matter how one looked at it, this explosion was far more devastating than the one which had leveled the Seventh Church!

A spherical ball of light expanded outwards and the night sky was lit up...

The entire wooden chapel was instantaneously turned to ash, spreading far and wide before disappearing into the white light.

In the middle of where the Church of Charity used to be, Vincent stood silently, clutching the old priest’s ashen head. Flowing golden flames streamed out of his two empty eye sockets, falling to the ground in droplets.

Lin Jie was startled by the subtle shaking of the ground. He hadn’t yet slept this light in the night because he was studying the book, ***Dark Ages, Rise & Fall of Alfords*** .

While deeply engrossed in the book, Lin Jie felt the table start to shake before his legs did as well.

He never had the habit of shaking his legs while reading and immediately sensed something was wrong. In the beginning, he thought it was an earthquake, but he noticed some light when he looked out of the window.

“...Huh?”

Lin Jie was startled and pulled the curtains open for a better look.

In the distance, he saw a small luminous light spot in the distance as well as the faint sound of rumbling.

“Another gas explosion!?”

Chapter 150: Sailor Moon

Chapter 150: Sailor Moon

The corners of Lin Jie's mouth twitched. Gazing out of the window, he felt an inexplicable sense of guilt.

Making sure he still had a conscience, Lin Jie muttered to himself, "The first two times that were a little close, and maybe because I'm cursed, but it's many streets away from me this time. I think it has nothing to do with me, right?"

He still remembered the last time he said, "Hopefully, everything gets better," and there was a gas explosion that very same night on the street opposite him, which turned everything there into ruins.

I don't think I have made such inauspicious remarks recently...

Shaking his head, Lin Jie drew the curtains and went back to his desk.

Hmm... gas explosions seem to be quite frequent in Norzin.

Lin Jie had seen such news almost every month for the past three years and certain gas plants blew up from time to time. Lin Jie sometimes even wondered whether they were manufacturing explosives rather than gas.

Although he joked so, some of Norzin's tabloid media went even further. They even suspected that these so-called gas plants were in fact secret arms factories of Rolle Resource Development.

And each explosion was actually them testing a new weapon...

A slightly more reliable media outlet said that it had secretly interviewed the senior management of Rolle Resource Development and obtained the information that this "gas" was actually a very unstable new energy that had been found in the Lower City District and still at an experimental stage, so accidents often occurred.

Opinions varied, but in short, the perennial explosions were one of Norzin's urban folktales.

Anyways, when the Central Districts governing body was asked for a reason behind this, there would only ever be one answer—"Don't ask. It's a gas explosion."

Lin Jie's gaze returned to the book on the table and his fingers went back to gently brushing the pages. He usually went to bed at this time, but he was so engrossed in the book today that he barely noticed time flying by.

If it weren't for the gas explosion interrupting him, Lin Jie might have read until dawn.

"It's rare for me to stay up this late..." sighed Lin Jie.

He then clipped on a bookmark, closed the book, and got ready for bed.

Truth be told, the book's illustration of the Alford's Kingdom's history was very detailed and vivid. There were plenty of magical and fantasy depictions that were like the stuff of legends, which made this book feel like a perfect combination of ancient Chinese myths and history that was really amazing to read.

However, as some of the descriptions regarding the early deeds of Candela, the last king of Alford's, were the same as what he had seen in his dreams, Lin Jie now felt that the contents in the book were mostly true, just that they could no longer be verified since all this happened a long time ago.

He had read till the part regarding the coming of the Dark Age where the Sun and the Moon were engulfed together by the darkness when he felt a hint of doubt.

This was because the Sun and the Moon were still in the sky as usual, and it didn't appear like they had been swallowed up.

However, he soon realized that the Sun and the Moon here might be symbolizing certain gods, and this part of the book referred to their deaths.

“The Sun was extinguished with silence while the Moon’s skin was stolen by beasts.” Such a weird and ambiguous description holds too many possibilities just by my speculation alone...

Lin Jie felt his head starting to hurt as he thought about all this and uttered to himself, “Silver said that she would tell me the truth only after I master swordsmanship. Ahh, I’ve been scammed!

“But constructing my own dream is even more of a scam!” grumbled Lin Jie as he switched off the light and lay down on his bed.

He had completed the framework for his first dream realm, but it was just an endless space filled with complete darkness. There was nothing there and Lin Jie could merely walk around in.

Lin Jie “placed” all the aether that he had collected into this dream realm. Only when he was in the dream could he enter the special state where he could see and feel aether.

Beyond that, progress moved at a snail’s pace.

It was really difficult to create objects that were close to reality in the dream realm until even himself could believe that such an object was real.

However, Lin Jie had a flash of inspiration today and thought of a way that might reduce the difficulty and make it easier to construct a dream.

Lin Jie was already standing in the darkness the next time he opened his eyes again.

Then, he reached out his hand, pressed slightly, and felt a flat surface. As he looked down, he saw an old mahogany wooden table in the space.

There was a pile of messy books, a few lesson plans, a pair of glasses, some small instruments, pens as well as a piece of old parchment.

Lin Jie smiled and rapped his knuckles on the tabletop. The sound,

the touch, and the texture were just like the real one.

“It worked.”

With that, he sat back boldly and was automatically caught by a chair that appeared out of nowhere.

The chair he had specially custom-made was as comfortable as usual. He closed his eyes and leaned back. Now, his feet could feel the touch of the wooden floor.

A familiar ceiling greeted his eyes as he gazed up.

Lin Jie then looked around and saw that the darkness had become a study room full of bookshelves with a faint smell of mold.

Not far from the desk, natural light shone through the window. Dust was flying in the air, and the lush, green leaves of a tree outside swayed and rustled in the wind.

Lin Jie was certain he would see ivy vines creeping along the wall if he went to open the window, and he would see a long corridor leading to the stairs if he opened the door on the other end.

This familiarity... was of course, his own house, which he had lived in for more than 20 years before he transmigrated. It was the place most familiar to him.

His first dream had been successfully crafted!

Lin Jie felt that creating any dreams in the future wouldn't be too difficult for him.

A deluge of nostalgia overwhelmed Lin Jie as he gazed at the parchment on his desk. He suddenly had an idea. *What if... I could construct people in the dream?*

He shook his head, dismissing the thought that only lasted for a second.

Mu'en got up at first light. She washed up, put on an apron, and started cooking. Then, she acted as a human clock and woke Boss Lin at the set time.

While having breakfast, Mu'en kept sneaking peeks at Lin Jie's face in between bites.

Then she suddenly made eye contact with Lin Jie.

Mu'en stopped immediately and stared at Lin Jie unblinkingly. Her cheeks were still bulging with the rice in her mouth, but she seemed boldly confident.

The corner of Lin Jie's mouth twitched. Placing his chopsticks down, he smiled patiently. "Do you have something to say?"

He understood that children of this age sometimes had embarrassing questions to ask their parents. Sometimes this required patient guidance from parents so that the children would go through their youth smoothly.

Mu'en hesitated, then nodded and said, "I...I want to be the Moon!"

... *Yeap, just like this.* Lin Jie's smile stiffened slightly.

Silly rascal, you want to become Sailor Moon too?

Chapter 151: Chicken Soup Master Refusing To Concede

Chapter 151: Chicken Soup Master Refusing To Concede

Lin Jie had quite an extensive experience with Mu'en's 'chunnibyou-ism'. Previously, when he had given her the dictionary to learn the basics, checking on her homework each time was like attending a chuunibyou convention.

Even though deep down he found it ridiculous, Lin Jie realized that this was a form of interest learning.

Since the child liked it and learned things quickly, Lin Jie decided he would let nature take its course. This was a good thing after all.

Lin Jie's teaching methods had always been open-minded. He often catered to each individual student's ability and was definitely a great teacher praised by many... Although this was slightly unrelated to his specialty, there weren't many strict requirements either.

But Mu'en's outburst of chunnibyou-ism this early in the morning has startled me quite a bit. More importantly, this sort of thought process is really too child-like. Ha-ha-ha-ha...

It's just like how kids would answer 'Ultraman' and other sorts of strange characters when the teacher asks "what is your dream?"

Lin Jie had thought that Mu'en would be more mature than her peers given her apathetic temperament. However, she was still a childish imp at heart.

For a moment, Lin Jie froze up as he imagined Mu'en's face hanging on the moon and giggling like the sun in the Teletubbies. Then, he couldn't help letting out a snort as he tried to hold back his laughter.

Seeing the way Teacher's Lin was trying to stifle his laughter made Mu'en think she had been taken for a fool and her cheeks puffed up even more.

She had made a move last night with Walpurgis' cooperation and had given the remnants of the Sun buried in Walpurgis' dream realm to the Sun Scripture-wielding Vincent, and bestowed him with the power of the Sun's remnants.

This caused the conflict to intensify several times quicker, alarming the Church of the Dome's pope. Fortunately the church wasn't yet vigilant enough to the unknown.

Taking advantage of the Church of the Dome's lack of information and arrogance, two apostles were killed and an entire parish leveled.

This was the first step of Mu'en's covenant with Walpurgis. While this was an almost perfect start for them, it would take more than their combined strengths to root those false gods out.

The power of the true Moon had already been seized by them and Walpurgis only had enough strength to sustain her dreams, but she wasn't able to interfere with reality yet.

— Naive little Mu'en felt that she had been duped by Walpurgis, an old witch who had lived for ages, but there was no room for regret now.

Thus, she had chosen to use Vincent.

Vincent's body possessed the Moon's divine power which had a common source as the Sun and was entirely receptive to the Sun's divine power. Moreover, with Sun Scripture as a medium, he was the perfect candidate.

On top of that, as a victim of the religion, he was already on the verge of being at odds with the Church of the Dome.

Safe to say, had it not been for Mu'en giving the Sun's remnants, Vincent would have met an even more ghastly end.

In the eyes of the church, he would be a virulent, hateful bug that just wouldn't die and they would choose to use all means to crush him repeatedly.

Given Vincent's softheartedness and weakness as a church member, those unfortunate parties that were dragged down wouldn't be the last.

Mu'en and Walpurgis were in agreement that the bookstore owner had given them the best option. Even though he hadn't explicitly said it out loud, he had lit up the path for them and only awaited their own voluntary cooperation.

He was all-knowing, but he just didn't say it.

Moreover, Walpurgis had vaguely indicated that she had slightly sensed Silver's aura from his body. That meant that her former comrade and fellow Primordial Witch must be searching for a means to return back to reality and likely had some sort of cooperative relationship with that mysterious bookstore owner.

They were on the same side.

However, the acceleration of their objective had entirely been Mu'en and Walpurgis' own initiative. Who knew if what they had done might perhaps negatively impact Lin Jie's plan.

Mu'en spent the whole night deliberating and felt uneasy at the thought that acting on her own might have disrupted the boss' master plan.

And that was why she had apprehensively spoken up to see Lin Jie's opinion.

But now it seemed like... The boss didn't particularly care about her actions in changing the fates of others and waited for them to return before guiding them in the direction of their next move.

It was as if he was just casually strumming the strings of someone's fate and waiting in interest for a special or unique reverb... And now the boss seemed like he was enjoying what he heard.

Mu'en felt a sense of inexplicable frustration. All she had done felt like a great deal to her, yet she was just like a young child playing house in the eyes of Boss Lin.

She silently swallowed the food in her mouth and asked, "Why are you laughing? What's wrong with wanting to become the moon..."

Lin Jie noticed a hint of slight grievance in Mu'en's tone. . *She's now being difficult to deal with.*

"Ahem... Nothing, it's not a bad idea. Uhm, I'm all for it."

Lin Jie cleared his throat and toned his smile down, trying his best to look more serious. Unfortunately, the slight glint in his eyes made him seem kindly.

He felt as if he had really adopted an adorable little kid.

Haa... she isn't just ordinarily cute either... Would most ordinary kids aspire to be the moon?

Mu'en grunted an acknowledgment. These words still sounded perfunctory to her.

But since he put it this way, that meant that Boss Lin approved of their actions.

Mu'en's unease lightened up considerably.

Lin Jie mused for a moment and felt that this was a good opportunity to impart some values to this young child.

Thus, he put down the chopsticks and spoke in a cajoling voice, "But wanting to become the moon is not an easy task. We must first formulate a comprehensive plan.

"Oh, how about you tell me how you came up with this idea? Or rather, why do you wish to become the moon?"

Mu'en was slightly taken aback. Then, after putting some meticulous thought into it, she answered with hesitation, "Because... It's beautiful?"

Her initial experience entering Walpurgis' dream realm had introduced her to the sensations of shock and pulsation for the first time. The only thing going through her mind at that time was that the dream full of stars was so unbelievably beautiful that it made her desire owning it.

Thus, she had inexplicably agreed to help Walpurgis.

“...” Lin Jie's lips twitched.

*This reason is d*mn impeccable. Simply irrefutable!*

Haa... Children are indeed so straightforward that they can see through appearance and perceive the innate...

However, the Chicken Soup Master refused to concede.

“Do you know how the moon's beauty comes about?”

Lin Jie conveniently snuck in some science, “Actually, the moon itself doesn't shine. Beautiful moonlight is actually the reflection of light from the sun.

“However, the sun's light is always so overbearing and can't be directly looked at. Though warm, it can't reach the depths of a person's heart.

“On the other hand, the moon transforms that light and only then does it glow with such beautiful radiance.

“Respectfulness, humility, gentleness, and tolerance. These are the characteristics of the Moon. These are all things you can't do without if you wish to become the Moon.

“On top of that, the Moon is also a bridge that links people. In the quiet of night, those thinking of their hometown would always see the moon whenever they look up. That is why the Moon always carries pure, primitive emotions and beliefs in the hearts of people and supports the weary spirits of many.”

Lin Jie rubbed Mu'en's head and gave his heartfelt conclusion, “The Moon isn't a heartless object, but something that people entrust

their sentiments with. Only by understanding this would you be able to become one.”

Chapter 152: Mhm, Yeah, That's Right

Chapter 152: Mhm, Yeah, That's Right

Lin Jie had a simple idea. Since Mu'en wanted to become the moon, then he would play along — this was how he usually won over his customers as well.

Playing along to a customer's whims and needs was a must. As the saying goes, honest advice could be unpleasant to the ear.

Some questions when answered honestly could be rudely unpleasant and cause a negative reaction.

This would be very disadvantageous when dealing with customers. And who liked hearing such harsh words even if it was the truth?

Even if he wanted to change the mindset of the others, Lin Jie preferred to convince others using their own logic before using his own words to guide them smoothly.

Of course, it also depended on the situation. If the other person was a fool, then Lin Jie would not mind giving them a harsh strike in order to correct their way of thinking.

After all, the point of studying was to allow one to speak calmly with fools whereas exercising was to ensure fools would speak to oneself calmly.

This was also the reason why Lin Jie never forgot to exercise daily after transmigrating.

But in any case, it was the same reasoning behind educating children of this age. Although coercion and intimidation might be effective as well, it would often have an imperceptibly negative impact on a child which could prove detrimental to the child's character or views.

Mr. Lin felt that childlike innocence and interest were very good qualities worth keeping, but there was a need to put an end to this chunnibyou-ism which was heading in the wrong direction.

For chunnibyou-ism with the wrong mindset could be dangerous.

Thus, he needed to inculcate good values from the beginning and guide her along a positive direction.

The moon itself was actually a good entry point so why not let Mu'en continue playing the role and find the correct values and build her character this way.

Lin Jie felt that he was simply the messenger of justice.

Mu'en nodded thoughtfully though did not fully understand, but she had managed to catch three points.

First was the connection the Moon and the Sun had, as well as the reason for the Moon's existence.

The most important part about this point was "transformation", which was the core of the moon's power. By taking external forces for its own, and transforming it into its own enormous power.

In fact, it wasn't just limited to the Sun, but the entire galaxy. It was just that the Sun's influence was the greatest.

Mhmm, Boss knows everything of course. He explained the relationship between the Moon and the Sun so thoroughly and it's exactly as Walpurgis says.

The second point was the qualities that the moon ought to have, and as for the third... It was more like a dogma.

As the moon was eternal and everlasting, it was destined to become something divine to people and was bound to have believers and followers.

Just like the Church of the Dome.

Mu'en vaguely felt that the boss was mocking the Church of the

Dome. Thinking back to their decisive and ruthless actions from last night, it didn't seem like they were a religion believing in the peaceful and gentle moon, but more like an evil cult.

They only wished to control the minds of their believers, without any consideration for that so-called "Respectfulness, humility, gentleness, and tolerance."

There's no room for any contrary opinion in the Church of the Dome.

Nobody knew how many other internal victims just like Vincent were being controlled by the Church of the Dome, via their addiction to Holy Moon Essence.

The third point, of course, was the domain of faith and power. They need to rebuild a pure religion to re-establish and tie the faithful and gain the power of faith.

At present, two apostles had fallen due to Vincent's sudden attack and [Silent Domain] and [Heresy Trial] had been reclaimed... The latter's original name was actually [Source Death], a power governed by the laws of source that could wipe out all things and was a truly godly domain.

But when the Church of the Dome came into possession of it, some misunderstandings occurred and it had become a pure destructive power that obliterated anything of a different source (only referring to the moon's divine power).

The range of that concept was infinitely narrowed, and its power level fell considerably.

No wonder Walpurgis was so contemptuous of the false god and even called it a "beast".

Other than possessing great power, it was actually really stupid, like an ignorant primitive beast that simply didn't know how to use these powers.

Noticing Mu'en's expression, Lin Jie felt that she was a promising student and worth teaching. He withdrew his hand and patted her

shoulder, saying, "It's not easy wanting to be the moon, but a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

"Nothing in the world is impossible as long as you put your heart into it. If you are willing to work hard and do more good deeds, you will become the moon in everyone's heart one day."

With an ambiguous smile on his face, Lin Jie changed the wording discreetly and replaced the actual physical moon with the moon in everyone's heart.

With this, the silly child wouldn't really think of flying up into the sky... right?

But then again, being an astronaut is still a rather decent aspiration.

"Mhmm." Mu'en saw Lin Jie's smile and nodded her head obediently.

"I believe you can definitely do it. As for the specifics... Well, you can start with helping me solve Vincent's problem. If the Church of the Dome is really using addiction to control their clergy, then these guys are really bad to the bone and have to be removed," Lin Jie said with a satisfied grin.

He was quite concerned about Vincent's situation and had sent someone to ask about him a couple of days ago but still hadn't gotten a reply yet.

It just so happened that this was quite a good counterexample. Of course, he wasn't going to let the child do anything dangerous and would just get her to help in research or look up some resources.

"You see, Mu'en, this so-called moon is fake and is destined to be destroyed..."

Lin Jie then recalled Sailor Moon Usagi again and remarked, "The moon that I've seen in my hometown was also a young and beautiful girl with the catchphrase, 'In the name of the moon, I shall punish you!'

"It means to execute justice for the heavens, and so, the Moon is

also a symbol of justice.”

So, his conclusion was — *cute girls are justice*.

Lin Jie eyed Mu'en, but didn't say the last line out loud in order to still maintain his parental authority.

Mu'en noticed that Boss Lin's gaze was a little strange, but she was more immersed in his words at the moment.

She understood that this was what the boss wanted from the beginning.

She would establish a new church and overthrow the Church of the Dome, but not necessarily force the masses to respect and worship her...

She too never had such thoughts, for her greatest wish had seemed to come true the moment she had escaped from the lab.

To become a free and real being, and she now had a new way of thinking.

With only one year to live, Mu'en wanted to be remembered by more people. She wanted to let this world remember her existence!

“Yes, I will,” Mu'en's eyes gradually revealed an unwavering gaze. “Help Vincent, and carry out... justice.”

“Mhm, yeah, that's right,” said Lin Jie gleefully.

Mu'en returned to her dream, using the excuse of taking an afternoon nap.

She saw Walpurgis sitting sideways on the illusionary crescent moon, her black dress billowing, exposing her smooth, fair legs as well as her slender and beautiful bare feet, which created circular ripples on the water.

With her head slightly askew, she rested her chin in her hand and

appeared to be deep in thought.

Mu'en moved a little closer. She didn't know if she was seeing things, but Walpurgis' cheeks were a little flushed as she seemed to be muttering,

“...Sailor Moon or something...”

Chapter 153: Witch's Happy Chair

Chapter 153: Witch's Happy Chair

Mu'en waited for a bit before calling out, "Walpurgis."

Walpurgis flinched for a moment and stopped her feet swaying on the water surface and lifted them up. She then sat up straight and cleared her throat. "What's the matter, Mu'en?"

If Mu'en hadn't seen it with her own eyes, she would never have imagined that the woman, who was lying on the illusionary crescent moon with her chin propped up in her hands just now, was the same mysterious and elegant Primordial Witch from before.

Watching the blush on Walpurgis' face disappear in real time was like the astonishment of watching a Sichuan Opera's Face Changing performance, and now Mu'en had gained an even deeper understanding of how sentient beings were like.

But it was so strange...

Mu'en could tell that Walpurgis was happy because the boss said "The moon is a young and beautiful girl," but...

Mu'en vaguely knew that Walpurgis was actually of a higher level than the moon and sun according to the rules that governed this realm.

It was just that she had personally played the role of the moon for a period of time because she had been bored sometime during those many long years.

Therefore, with some give or take, she could somewhat be regarded as the moon.

Walpurgis was indeed beautiful. Her beauty surpassed the limits of

humans and was practically perfect and capable of thoroughly leaving anyone in awe.

But what does she have to do with the words 'young girl'?

The artificially-created girl remained perplexed despite much thought.

Primordial Witches were the earliest of intelligent life born at the beginning of the primordial chaos of Azir. They possessed great power and controlled everything in the world.

However, in terms of age, she would nearly be as old as this land.

No one knew what the actual body of a Primordial Witch was like. Walpurgis' current appearance was just to integrate into human society. She became a woman to emphasize the special ability of creating all things. By human standards, she was the same age as ancestors many many many generations ago...

Under the gaze of Mu'en who was confused and lost in thought, Walpurgis' expression gradually stiffened up.

Although she didn't know what was on the child's mind, she could sense that something was off and it would be better not knowing it.

She kept smiling and decided to pretend that nothing had happened.

"Mu'en? It's about Vincent, right? I have heard as well."

Walpurgis stepped off the crescent moon elegantly and asked in a composed fashion, "See, I told you that he had expected it and was waiting for you to make a move.

"He will definitely agree with what we are going to do next. In fact, it was he who helped us with Vincent's matter. This is his purpose.

"When Vincent arrives, we can cooperate with him to start the second step of the plan."

Mu'en nodded. "For the sake of justice, the Church of the Dome has

to be thoroughly overthrown...”

Walpurgis reached out and caressed Mu'en's face. “Since you don't want to establish a new faith and don't want to be worshiped by others, Vincent will be the most suitable person. Just let the religion of the Sun take the place of the Church of the Dome.”

“Must there be a new faith?” asked Mu'en.

Walpurgis didn't expect such a question from Mu'en. Surprised, she asked, “What do you think?”

Walpurgis threw the question back to the young girl in order to help her think independently.

After all, Walpurgis had already given her dream realm to Mu'en and would let Mu'en inherit her power, as if she was her disciple.

Mu'en tilted her head, thinking about the cruel deaths of the old priest as well as the apostles due to their firm belief in their faith.

Both cases had the same beliefs and were blinded, but the difference between them was like heaven and earth.

Mu'en was worried that the new faith would end up in the same situation as the Church of the Dome, and so came up with her own opinion.

Would it be better if the churches don't exist?

Mu'en still couldn't come up with an answer. It was all too complicated.

“It's not that the divine needs believers. Rather, it's people who need faith.”

With a smile, Walpurgis continued on, “The insignificant faith of a human does not matter to the Sun nor the Moon. However, humans need spiritual sustenance and protection, and this is the reason for the existence of the churches.

“At least, the believers of the Church of the Dome are used to this

kind of life. If you just destroy it without establishing a new one, those faithful will crumble overnight.

“You have to let them understand that they were not deceived by their faith, but rather, by bad persons.”

Mu'en was confused and her blank face showed it.

Walpurgis burst into laughter. She pushed Mu'en to sit on the illusionary crescent moon and said, “That beast just found a beautiful dress for itself, but humans used it to do the bad things that they wanted.

“Words proclaiming faith... No, the new church's teachings. Let your Boss Lin come up with them. He seems to be very good at it.

“All you have to do is do what you ought to do. That's all there is to it.”

Mu'en steadied herself on the gently swaying crescent moon and asked, “Aren't you the Primordial Witch? Why do you even care what humans think?”

She touched the illusionary moon and felt that it was like... An old rocking chair.

Walpurgis had no idea about the unspoken criticism within the artificial girl's heart, and the corners of her lips twitched. “I made an agreement with humankind before, to protect these weak creatures during the dark. It's a promise I can't break.

“Oh, by the way, the Church of the Dome should be in a state of panic by now. They should be running away in fear if they understand what they are up against.

“However, they who have absolute faith in their beliefs lack wisdom and will only be incompetent and angry. They would want to eliminate this huge threat out of fear, and soon they would probably pursue Vincent to the bookstore.”

In reality, the Church of the Dome currently wasn't just in a state of panic—they were scared witless.

It was only one night... No, just half a night. The main church of an entire parish was razed to the ground, and two apostles turned into fireworks. One of them was the head of the Inquisition Office and amongst the two strongest apostles of the church.

Even if they wished to prevent the news from spreading, it was impossible because the extent of it was just too great... Only ordinary folk could be deceived by a stupid reason such as a gas explosion.

All transcendent beings and organizations had already caught wind of it.

People who didn't know better would have thought that the Moon had unleashed its wrath and divine punishment onto them.

Those who assumed that they knew what happened reckoned that it was a fiasco caused by an apostate that obtained power with the aspect of laws.

As for those who knew... This was indeed divine wrath and punishment, but it was the Sun that imposed it, conveniently using the Moon in the passing.

The Church of the Dome had issued the highest wanted order right away.

The entire of Norzin's transcendent community was in an uproar all at once. Although the various major forces might choose to wait and see, independent transcendent beings had already started to move...

After all, there would still be a huge payout if they were only providing clues.

On the same ordinary morning, while the ordinary folks were still discussing the sudden gas explosion the previous night, waves were rippling in the world of transcendent beings.

However, Vincent, who was the focus of the whole of Norzin, simply stayed in the center of the explosion for a whole night. On the second day, he hid his aura and began to flee.

Those flames had the effect of affecting the Moon's divine power.

Members of the Church of the Dome didn't dare to approach at all, and nobody would have imagined that Vincent would remain in the blast center for an entire night.

And just like this, Vincent managed to avoid the most dangerous time hiding out in the darkness.

Back to the present, Vincent looked up, his gaze falling on the bookstore window.

He took a deep breath, then pushed open the door and entered.

Chapter 154: Vincent Feels Lost

Chapter 154: Vincent Feels Lost

At this moment, Vincent had a somewhat despondent appearance. His own priest robes had already completely burned down in his confrontation with Waning Moon Apostle Buck. Thus, he had changed into a hooded black robe.

Of course, this was to be expected of those ordinary priest robes. It would really be strange if those clothes managed to survive that Destructive-rank explosion.

As for the current clothes he wore... It was thanks to Buck himself, who now only existed as ashes.

The black robes worn by the Waning Moon Apostle was a high quality transcendent object magically enhanced over thirty times, and various Destructive-rank techniques invisible to the human eye acted on every single corner of this robe constantly.

The material of this robe was also rather special and had an astonishing defensive capability for it to come out unscathed from the center of a Destructive-rank explosion.

Unfortunately, Buck had been blown up from the inside by Vincent back then and this garb wasn't capable of preventing it.

It was this black robe torn from Buck's body that allowed Vincent to successfully escape the Church of Dome and their transcendent beings while he was at his weakest.

After almost a day spent in hiding and adjusting, Vincent had more or less understood his new body that had been transformed by the 'Sun's Core' as well as his new power.

The 'Sun's Core' was that miniature sun-like object he had received from the young girl within his dream. After being thoroughly transformed, he had gained the boundless knowledge contained

within it and understood the changes within his body.

Firstly the book, Sun Scripture, had already become one with him. The runes that fell off the pages of the book were the Sun's powers.

As of now, he still couldn't fully control these powers and currently could only use three.

The first was [Sun's Praise]. This was the ability he unleashed right at the beginning. He actually possessed this power when he first got hold of Sun Scripture, and this was what subconsciously caused Hyman's self-combustion during his assassination attempt.

When Vincent had been surrounded with no means of escape, he had thoroughly activated Sun Scripture as well as this ability. At that time, he obtained energy bestowed by the Sun in the form of that huge fiery ball which killed Vanessa.

The second was [Status Domination]. This was the reason behind the natural suppression of the Moon's divine powers as most of the Moon's own power originated from the Sun. It was especially so since the false god worshiped by the Church of the Dome didn't have its own foundation, and all the stolen power was just like oil barrels waiting to be ignited.

Buck had died to this ability, and Vanessa's death was largely due to [Status Domination] as well.

The third was [Activated Blaze Body]. After receiving the 'Sun's Core', Vincent was destined to no longer be human.

His heart had already been replaced by the Sun's Core and his entire body was now like the sun — a combination of boiling lava, heated mist, solar flares and spots. His surface was like a semi-fluid magma, while his insides was a hot solid gold.

His other organs no longer existed, or rather, had been replaced.

Using this ability would make him appear like a humanoid sun or a living flame.

But of course, under most normal circumstances, Vincent could still

retain his normal human image.

Originally, Sun Scripture which had been given by the bookstore owner wasn't that powerful. But after the Sun's Core was obtained, it was like fuel had been added to a flame which now blazed out of control.

The mere Sun's Core had immediately pushed him up to Pandemonium-rank.

Pandemonium-rank was not to be underestimated. According to the Truth Union's APDS classification, Pandemonium-rank was defined as a transcendent being capable of causing mass panic.

This broad definition included people like Ji Zhixiu, the leader of a new hunter group, as well as the remaining five apostles of the Church of the Dome. These were all well-known beings that already far surpassed most transcendent beings.

However, under most circumstances, it wouldn't be difficult for Vincent to hit a low-level Destructive-rank if he were to use this ability.

Just that this would lead to him entering a temporary duration of weakness.

Moreover, it wouldn't be like this where he was able to recover in just a day — in the previous emergency, he had used the 'Sun's Core' to replenish his strength, causing it to shrink a little. In layman terms, this was like shortening his life for a temporary power boost.

But it isn't enough! I can only fend off one Destructive-rank, but the Church has the Saintesses of the Light and Dark as well as the Supreme-rank pope, Rodney!

They are only holding back out of fear right now. If they were to react and realize that I'm not as strong as I seem... They will definitely try to kill me at all costs!

My own power alone is far from enough!

After a night of reflection, his burning anger had cooled and Vincent was now much calmer than before.

He knew very well that his present advantage was just a temporary illusion.

Fortunately, Vincent was eventually able to make it to the bookstore this time.

Upon stepping in and hearing the bookstore owner's "Welcome," Vincent couldn't help but heave a sigh of relief. All his frayed nerves (even though he no longer had nerves) immediately eased up and he felt a wave of exhaustion sweeping through his body.

Even though he didn't know where this sense of security came from, just the thought of the bookstore owner's warm and kind smile made him feel at ease even if he was being besieged from all sides.

It had only been a few days since he was last here, but it seemed like a lifetime ago.

Vincent pulled his hood back and 'looked' over.

His eyes had been vaporized the moment he received the Sun's Core and was now filled with only light and heat. Opening his eyes would unleash an eruption of light from his eyes, so he chose to keep them shut with the blindfold back on.

As always, the bookstore owner was seated at the counter flipping through a book. "Welcome" was entirely a reflex and he now closed the book and looked up.

When he saw Vincent, Lin Jie frowned and sat up straight. "Father, welcome back... You don't look too well."

Lin Jie had chosen his words carefully. Vincent didn't seem in good shape and was even a little haggard. Moreover, he seemed really tense, exuding an air of determination as if a fire had been ignited within him.

From Lin Jie's experience, only one thing could cause a person to undergo such a transformation.

And that was hatred!

Moreover, Vincent had only been gone a few days and his priest robes were already gone when he returned.

Just the Church's use of abusive substances weren't enough to make a priest who had been a believer for many years turn his back on the faith. Evidently, he might have encountered something even more seditious.

Lin Jie had previously suggested for Vincent to hide the truth and first report his own situation as a test. Theoretically speaking, this had the lowest risk, but it wasn't impossible for Vincent to encounter problems during this process.

And perhaps that happened. The Church might have caught on and tried controlling him or perhaps did something even more deranged that invoked such intense feelings of hatred.

Which caused him to eventually betray the Church and flee to the bookstore.

Lin Jie put aside his book, folded his arms and made a guess, "You've gotten out... Has the Church of the Dome done something to you and the people around you?"

Mu'en took the initiative and poured two cups of tea which she placed on the counter.

"I'm sorry that it took up a bit of time." Vincent grimaced, closing the door before going over and taking a seat.

He couldn't help sneaking a glance at Mu'en. Now that they were in close proximity, he was even more certain that this was the young girl in his dream and there was definitely a sense of familiarity between them.

Just like... A family member he could trust completely.

For Vincent who had just lost someone close, this was akin to encountering an oasis in the middle of a desert and it somewhat soothed his hateful heart.

If that's so, then she's probably the real Moon.

At this moment, Mu'en also met Vincent's gaze that was behind the black cloth and gave a nod which could be seen as official confirmation.

"Huuu...." Vincent exhaled sharply. The bookstore owner was probably helping her from the shadows and had intentionally made Colin next door reckon that something was amiss.

This in turn led to Vincent's attempted exorcism of the bookstore which developed into a step-by-step guidance that made him discover the Church of the Dome's true nature.

It's a really profound and far-sighted opening move.

But speaking of neighbors... There no longer seems to be an audio-visual store next door and I don't sense any life inside.

Indeed, the bookstore has already gotten rid of that ordinary man after making use of him.

"The Church of the Dome was using Holy Moon Essence to control members of the clergy, and..." Vincent shut his eyes. "The old priest who was like a father to me and who baptized me was killed by them..."

"He died because of me. It wouldn't have had to end this way if only I had been more sensible then."

But there were no longer any what-ifs and Vincent didn't dare think about what it could have been.

When he had arrived then, the Waning Crescent Apostle had followed shortly after. He had clearly gone straight to the Chapel of Charity, meaning that their objective was the old priest.

If Vincent hadn't gone there, they might have used the old priest as a hostage and the consequences could be even worse.

Lin Jie was appalled. Even though he had already assumed the worst of them, he hadn't imagined the Church of the Dome to be

this brutal.

Indiscriminate killing without the slightest of scruples.

But on further thought as well as what he'd been learning occasionally over the past few years, Lin Jie understood that the Church of the Dome was the largest faith in Norzin and in some ways could be even more terrifying than Rolle Resource Development.

They held a monopoly in spiritual following and possessed a great number of believers. Killing someone and labeling the victim as an apostate could even have been met with praise and cheers.

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Lin Jie as he pushed over a cup of tea, noticing that Vincent didn't seem willing to talk about it.

After all, different people had different ways in which they dealt with joy and sorrow.

From Vincent's expression, Lin Jie was able to tell that what Vincent needed at this time wasn't consolation but validation and support instead.

"What are you going to do next? I can help you as best as I can. Uhm, and so will my assistant," said Lin Jie solemnly.

"The Church of the Dome must definitely be hiding even more unimaginable secrets if they are capable of doing something like that.

"They aren't deceiving just the clergy but the faithful masses of the entire Norzin.

"Many people must have been killed in silence and now... we might be the only ones who know the truth."

Such evil killing as and when they please... This church was simply a den of thieves. It's a frightening thought for them to have such a great presence in Norzin for so many years.

Mu'en nodded and said earnestly, with words in line with

Walpurgis and Lin Jie's own, "They believe in a false moon, a beast that has stolen the Moon's power and name, while using it for hidden and evil means.

"We need to let the masses know the truth and bring down the Church of the Dome. That is the just cause."

Lin Jie glanced at Mu'en in surprise.

Ahh... Cute comrade Mu'en has learned how to speak so eloquently and can fill in the gaps of this to paint a complete picture of what's going on. A promising student indeed...

Lin Jie reckoned that Mu'en had secretly peeked at the book, ***Dark Ages: Rise & Fall of Alfords*** which he usually kept in his study.

What she had said was close enough to the book and thus, Lin Jie didn't counter her words.

"This is the just cause," repeated Vincent through gritted teeth. "I'll definitely make them pay!"

Lin Jie sighed. *Hatred is a powerful tool indeed... He was still an honest and gentle priest just a few days ago, but it's like he's filled with vengeful fury right now.*

"Don't get carried away by hatred, and don't let grief overwhelm your sensibility."

Lin Jie reached out for the bookshelf as he continued his preaching, "Calm down first, then try to think of a way. Right now, your current ability is far from enough. You have to seize an opportunity..."

Vincent took a deep breath, calming down the boiling lava within that was threatening to overflow. "Seize... an opportunity?"

"That's not the point. Here, take this," Lin Jie said as he pushed a book over. "You should calm down first."

As Vincent was momentarily stunned, Lin Jie had already shoved his book in front of Vincent and said, "What you need to do first is

to hold on to yourself and find your purpose.

“You have a firm goal now, but you will find yourself at a loss once you accomplish your revenge. Do you get it?”

“You need to find more things to do. Stuff that you can find support in for your future life.”

Gazing into the distance, Lin Jie dropped his enlightening line, “After all... Even the darkest of nights will end and the sun will rise.”

Mhm, Father Vincent’s mental state right now is probably like being stuck in an unseen mire without realizing anything is amiss.

In Lin Jie’s scope of doling out chicken soup of the soul, he reckoned that Vincent would probably be utterly wasted if he were to go through and finish his revenge.

Revenge is one thing, but he mustn’t lose himself in the process.

Thus, the most important thing right now was to let Vincent first set his sights further. Lin Jie chose a braille copy of ***The Sun Also Rises*** by Hemingway.

Reading books made one wise — Although the story itself was slightly depressive, the essence of it was a yearning for freedom, fairness as well as individuality and an indomitable and persevering spirit.

Lin Jie believed Vincent would be able to understand the meanings within it.

Vincent picked up the book and brushed his fingers over the cover as he listened to the bookstore owner’s instructions. Deep down, he couldn’t help feeling shocked yet confused.

His gaze fell on the book’s title in warped characters, making him pause as a doubt crept up in his mind at this inappropriate time.

Do you really want me to calm down? You aren’t encouraging me to take down the Church of the Dome instead?

All he saw was the words written on the title — *Eternal Judgment* .

Feeling inexplicably dazed, Vincent asked, “I should find some... more things to do that I can find support in?”

Lin Jie took a sip of tea, feeling like he had just saved a lost little lamb.

He nodded encouragingly. “That’s right. How about you try reading it?”

Chapter 155: Rodney: Aren't I One Too?

Chapter 155: Rodney: Aren't I One Too?

Lin Jie encouraged, “Don’t be so hung up on hatred. This is merely something that needs to be done and not your everything. Life isn’t just about the present. There’s much more to discover in life than only what’s ahead of you. Your life will become more wonderful if you broaden your horizons...”

He paused, then chuckled, “Of course, before then, we’d have to settle that bunch from Church of the Dome and let those dead rest in peace.”

Vincent nodded. Having made up his mind, he took a deep breath and slowly flipped open the book.

Vincent’s body trembled slightly as the book filled with taboo and cryptic characters opened slowly.

At that moment, an ominous sensation erupted and he was immediately besieged by indescribable hallucination and was struck with fear. Darkness covered everything before him, and it was as if he had fallen off a chair and plunged into the cosmic abyss as a rapid sense of weightlessness came over him.

Vincent’s field of vision was spinning.

He opened his eyes wider and his senses were assaulted by tremendous heat.

Flaming crimson burned his eyes, and a giant, formless plume of flame was stirred by an invisible force as though it was alive.

In the center of the dispersing plume of flame was an indescribably huge ball of fire surrounded by countless spots of light!

The mottled, dull orange surface was covered in ugly black spots, as well as fierce storm swirls spewing spiraling arcs of flame which rose into the sky like monstrous pillars.

Those black spots were moving constantly and erratically. Some were getting bigger, colliding with the storm and devouring each other to become a huge, blazing chasm, while others got smaller and eventually turned to nothingness.

The entire ball of fire was filled with an air of destruction and its core was constantly collapsing. The plume of heated mist and flame expanded and contracted continuously as if it were brewing a monstrous fury and emitting a silent roar into the eternal universe.

This was a sun heading towards its destruction!

Silently and sorrowfully, Vincent was deeply shaken. In his shock, he was drawn towards that huge ball of fire. His body had also been ignited, making him continuously absorb the power from the flames and establishing a barely discernible connection.

He suddenly came to a realization. This was the end of the Sun's path. Its collapse, its destruction... This was its end.

But the sun would not die out. Once a sun heads towards destruction, it represents the new birth of another sun, which would emanate an eternal and indestructible light in the universe!

Is this 'Eternal Doom'?...

Vincent was thoroughly shaken. With just his current level of mastery over his new powers, he was more than capable of killing a Destructive-rank, let alone when he fully mastered them.

It could be said that if he completely mastered the Sun's Core and **Sun Scripture**, it would be equivalent to ascending to Supreme-rank, which would already be the pinnacle of the known power hierarchy.

However, the bookstore owner had opened the doors to show Vincent a whole new world that made Vincent realize he had a narrow view of the world now that broader paths were presented

before him.

The path would only continue to extend as long as he didn't stop. He could feel the weak will of the sun before him, but that Sun didn't possess intellect and its stream of consciousness was chaotic, with only bits and pieces of fragmented thoughts.

Vincent's heart skipped a beat. *If I can really establish a connection with the sun, would something different happen? Would I become... the real sun god?*

Is... is this what the bookstore owner meant by "More things I can find support in for my future life"?!

Vincent felt that he now understood what the bookstore owner meant.

At the same time, a deep sense of fear washed over him.

It turns out that Supreme-rank isn't the limit but merely the extremes that small, insignificant humans can imagine. Yet in the vast cosmos, there seems to be no end to the powerful.

And what level was this bookstore owner at to be capable of handing out this degree of knowledge so casually?

Could he be one of those others?

Vincent felt that there was a terrifying entity lying behind the human form of the bookstore owner.

Lin Jie saw Vincent's face turn grave as he 'read' the book.

Now that Vincent seemed to have calmed down slightly, Lin Jie cleared his throat and said, "I spoke to you about seizing an opportunity because in truth, you wouldn't be able to do anything with your own power.

"Even if I'm exaggerating slightly and you were to go head on against the church and start fighting back, you could maybe beat ten of them, but only ten of them. The Church of Dome has countless followers and clergy.

“Moreover, this is too dangerous, exchanging your precious life for a few scumbags is simply unnecessary...”

Vincent had been stunned and merely sitting on his seat listening in a daze.

Now, a shiver made him snap him back to his reality and his face was covered in cold sweat and he looked terrified.

Still dazed, he nodded nervously. “Yes, you’re right.”

Lin Jie took a glance at the ex-priest and knew that he had been enlightened. He then continued, “Obviously this line of thinking wouldn’t work, but don’t you already have the biggest trump card against the Church of Dome?”

Vincent responded at once. “Holy Moon Essence!”

Boss Lin was right, it was impossible for him to overthrow the Church of Dome all by himself. What’s more important now was to turn the tables and destroy the Church of Dome’s false faith.

Unfortunately, all of his Holy Moon Essence had been destroyed in the massive explosion and fire, without leaving behind even one bit...

He told this to Lin Jie, but the latter just shook his head and said, “Just one portion doesn’t matter. What matters is its source, composition, and evidence.

“And even all of this isn’t important either. What’s crucial is to make the masses believe you.”

Lin Jie folded his arms and struck his usual pose. “There must be special channels for them to get the raw materials for such stuff.

“If that is, the Ash Chamber of Commerce and Rolle Resource Development will surely have something to do with it. I’ll get them to help investigate... As for the kind of publicity that can shake the Church of the Dome, I think a priest like you would know better than I.

“Ah that’s right, speaking of it, the Church of the Dome must be thinking about how to silence you... They might be reaching soon.”

Lin Jie palmed his own forehead and dialed Claude’s number.
“Hello, police? There’s going to be a problem with the Church of the Dome.”

“Vincent has indeed returned to the bookstore. That Supreme-rank who appeared out of nowhere seems to be the true mastermind.”

After all, how could an ordinary priest suddenly gain such strong and properly channeled direction while also developing suspicions about the Holy Moon Essence?

“All of this was mentioned in Vanessa’s report before she died. This bookstore owner must be the lackey of an evil god!”

“If their aim is to shake up and take over the Church of the Dome, this wouldn’t be the last of it!”

So what if he is a Supreme-rank?

Aren’t I one too?

Pope Rodney squinted and eyed the top of his staff. The part that had originally melted had reappeared again, just that it was slightly duller than before.

He had no choice but to use the Sacred Artifact, ‘Sleeping Moon Child’, which was akin to the moon’s progeny and possessed a portion of its power.

He made a gesture to dismiss the one reporting and muttered, “Sheryl.”

“Here.”

The beautiful lady wearing white nun robes answered. There was an incomparably sacred and noble aura about her. But at this moment, she was with a child and the gentle expression on her face

was the radiance of a mother.

Rodney asked, “How is Buck’s conception?”

Sheryl caressed her stomach and said with a smile, “It’s going really well, I will bring him out from the darkness.”

As she spoke, her expression changed. She held her stomach as a large amount of blood gushed out through her fingers. Cold sweat covered her forehead, yet her painful expression was also mixed with gratification. “Life... and death... recurs... and the dead... receive... Ah!”

Sheryl fell to the ground. Her bulging stomach was being torn open by a hand from the inside. It was clearly the hand of a grown man.

Following that, the resurrected Buck clambered out from Sheryl’s stomach. Then, Sheryl, whose body was practically torn in two, reached out her two pale womanly hands.

The two hands propped on the ground, supporting the rest of the body as though it was a person standing up. Starting from the torn belly, Sheryl’s skin started to ‘flip itself’ from the insides, forming the appearance of another woman.

The Saintess of the Dark, Angelina.

As with the words of baptism— *We are one with the Moon. Birth under the bright, death under the dark. Each time, the Moon completes a cycle between light and darkness, the cycle of life and death recurs, and the dead receive new life.*

Buck knelt before Rodney with a maniacal glaze in his eyes and declared, “I won’t fail again this time!”

Chapter 156: Awaiting Sleep

Chapter 156: Awaiting Sleep

Claude was going through information reports pertaining to Blood Feast's activities. A mountain of paperwork had already piled up on his desk, sorted by priority and relevance.

Some of these had already been sorted and stamped for delivery to other departments and the elders, but there was still much more waiting to be dealt with.

Information on Blood Feast was of a high priority and that also meant that his work this afternoon had merely begun.

That very morning, he had just retired from the battlefield of that clean-up operation and rushed back to work.

This goes to show that life at Secret Rite Tower's Intelligence Branch was no easy job... In truth, Claude felt that he might go bald at a young age and was very worried about his hairline.

Claude's daily resentment reached its peak every day when he got up and observed his receding hairline.

"I sometimes really suspect that he accepted me as a disciple just so he could have free labor," Claude muttered to himself and sighed, slamming a file into the done pile.

Beep—

His communications device beeped at this moment.

Claude froze, then immediately took out his communications device. His face turned rigid when he saw the display screen.

Boss Lin!

Claude picked up the call and heard Lin Jie's opener. "Hello, police? There's going to be a problem with the Church of the Dome."

Claude was dumbfounded and the communications device nearly slipped out of his hands.

Church of the Dome?!

What's wrong with them? How have they offended him?

Wait a moment!

Is the bookstore owner behind the recent attack on the Church of the Dome as well as the destruction of the Seventh Parish Chapel?!

It all makes sense if that is so!

Come to think of it, only Boss Lin has this sort of power... Why did you all have to get involved with him for no reason?!

The Truth Union's incident had barely passed and Claude had even been called down to deal with the nephew of the Truth Union's chairman not too long ago — that bunch of 'Truth-seeker' rascals had visited the bookstore and became completely docile upon waking up and turning in to become the shopkeeper's henchmen.

Claude believed that this bunch had certainly been taught a severe lesson.

Boss Lin had Supreme-rank prowess in the form of deterrence on one hand, sweet, enticing words on the other, and an entire bookstore filled with boundless knowledge in between.

He had thoroughly subdued the Truth Union then.

The council of elders even speculated that the bookstore might be related to some sort of deity or god of knowledge, possibly with the goal of bringing all misguided members of the Truth Union onto the right path of faith.

Now, while the Truth Union's face was still smeared with the mud, why had the Church of the Dome gone and messed up...

"Boss Lin... Uhm, could you be more specific? What's the issue with the Church of the Dome?" asked Claude cautiously.

Lin Jie's voice sounded over the communications device, recounting the whole affair with Vincent. Of course, he didn't forget to emphasize the evils of the Church of the Dome and the current danger Vincent was in.

They were victims and naturally needed protection and saving.

"Holy Moon Essence..." Claude's face stiffened.

He didn't doubt the veracity of this information. A being of Boss Lin's caliber didn't have any need of lying to them.

Moreover... If Holly Moon Essence really showed side effects, then all it took was for Secret Rite Tower to make an investigation with their power.

Holy Moon Essence had only appeared relatively recent, and so did the activities of Blood Feast. This could become a big issue if there was any link between the two.

Thousands would be implicated if there really was a problem with the Church of the Dome.

This matter was too important for Claude to deal with on the spot. He needed to consult Joseph and inform the council of elders.

He stood up, put on his coat and said, "Please wait a bit, Boss Lin. If possible, I hope that you wouldn't cause too large a disturbance. I'm going to seek my superiors for instructions and be there soon."

Lin Jie expressed his understanding, after all it was unwise to inadvertently alert the foe or act rashly.

He also added that theirs was a weak and powerless side and the situation was extremely dangerous. All he could do was hope that the police would be sent over his way as soon as possible.

Claude had an incredulous look on his face as his lips twitched while agreeing.

What else could he say? In such a situation, all he needed to do was smile and speak pleasantries.

That night.

Buck floated in the air a distance away from the bookstore. He had on a new black robe and was practically fully merged within the darkness. With no holes or patterns on his mask, he appeared especially frightening.

Shiing!

The scythe cut a sharp curve in midair, in the shape of a crescent.

Facing the direction of the bookstore, Buck could sense the activity within. Currently, three people seemed to be sleeping. Vincent was hiding within the bookstore and the other two were the bookstore owner and what appeared to be his newly hired assistant.

Based on the aether from them, each was more ordinary than the last.

The aetheric fluctuation of the bookstore owner's in particular was utterly bleak, just like any ordinary human being.

However, anyone would know that this was completely a disguise. An unadorned and totally fake disguise.

In contrast, there were many more powerful hints of aetheric fluctuations in the surroundings that were as glaring as light beacons in the night sky.

All of these were transcendent beings that had gathered because of the Church of the Dome's bounty, observing and perhaps waiting to make a move.

But of course, now that Buck had arrived, these originally restless aetheric fluctuations quickly piped down, awaiting the destined battle between the Waning Crescent Apostle and the fabled bookstore owner.

Everyone knew that 'Dead Kingdom' Buck had been killed in a head-to-head encounter with the apostate and was resurrected by

the Saintess.

That was his most humiliating defeat ever...

This time, the powers bestowed by the Pope and Saintesses within him had been greatly strengthened. It was practically an overdraft that had forcefully propelled him to the levels of Supreme-rank.

His aetheric activity at the moment was like a massive deathly black blaze, consuming all aetheric energy within the surroundings.

He felt better than he had even been!

The power used by the apostate against the Moon's divine power was truly strange, but it consumed too much power and couldn't be used continuously.

Vincent in his current state was definitely too weak to strike again.

It was the bookstore owner that he was truly up against this time but Buck wasn't afraid, for he believed in the Pope's words.

Even if the foe was Supreme-rank, the Pope himself was Supreme-rank as well.

There was nothing for him to be afraid of, for true believers of the Moon never feared death!

He was one with the Moon!

Buck was silent for a moment, then moved forward. In the blink of an eye, he had reappeared in the street across the bookstore's entrance. He strolled forward, swung his sickle, and opened the door.

He burst inside the bookstore like a black sandstorm.

However, a sudden glaring white light appeared and took Buck by surprise. He couldn't help but stop and clasp his hands over his eyes.

"What is this?!" Fighting back the pain, Buck opened his eyes and

tears ran down his cheeks.

No, wait. Tears?!

He was shocked. He had full control over every bodily activity ever since he became a Destructive-rank and had never shed tears like an ordinary human for a long time.

But as he looked at his own eyes, clothes, and shoes, Buck realized he had turned back to what he had been a very long time ago, when he was still an ordinary man.

He looked up once again to get a proper look of the bookstore.

However, this was no longer a bookstore but rather an old mansion. Looking further ahead, Buck saw faint gleams of golden which might have been sunlight passing through the cracks of sealed windows.

But it was clearly night at this time.

It was just like a dream...

Chapter 157: Buck, The End

Chapter 157: Buck, The End

Damn it, I should have long sensed something amiss!

Buck cursed silently as he surveyed the strange new environment, then backed away warily.

The hall in front of him looked like the first floor of an old villa. At the corner, he could vaguely make out the stairs. There were shelves full of books on both his sides and several rooms slightly further. In the center of the hall was a sofa, tea table, and other items.

The windows were all completely shut. It was blurry and Buck could not see the outside.

However, there was this eerie feeling that someone was stalking his every movement from all angles. It felt as if someone in the dark was peeping at everything that was happening in this room and watching his every move.

At this moment, he felt that his power had vanished without a trace, as if it had evaporated into thin air. There were no active traces of aether anywhere around him at all.

He couldn't even feel the existence of aether... Let alone use it.

It was as though he had really become a normal human being!

At the same time, Buck felt that all the feelings and emotions he had lost due to his long life brought about by countless resurrections came flooding back to him like a raging torrent.

Anger, ignorance, fear... His emotions had never been so clear. It felt as though he, who had been underwater for a long time, suddenly broke the water's surface, and all his dulled senses returned.

But Buck didn't need these things that he had abandoned a long time ago. In fact, it was these things that made him, someone high-above who could wantonly judge the lives of others, fall into the abyss. These made him feel like his entire inner being was shaken up and crumbling.

Without power, he felt that he had nothing.

The feeling of superiority at being able to judge the lives of others was replaced by the fear of emptiness.

“No, impossible! This must be an illusion spell!

“I have to calm down. As long as I find clues and blend in, I will be able to decipher the opponent's power. My divine power is still present...”

Buck comforted himself as best as he could. He turned around and eyed the closed wooden door. Taking a deep breath, he tried to open it.

Creakk....

The door was locked shut. It didn't budge no matter how much force he used and stayed motionless as though it was one with this space.

Panting hard, Buck suddenly stopped and stared at his hands, which were gripping the doorknob tightly.

The subtle tremble of his hands was so obvious.

Only then Buck realized that it wasn't just his hands, wrists, and arms that were shaking. His entire body and legs trembled and were starting to become limp.

How can this be!

Impossible!

How can I be afraid!

The absolute sense of powerlessness Buck felt gradually turned into despair, which sprouted hysteria within him.

He suddenly released the door handle as though he had been jolted by an electric current. His chest heaved heavily and he forced himself to calm down.

He then turned towards the corner stairs.

The caster who set up such a scene must want the target caught in this spell to mistakenly think that the illusion was real and ensnare within it.

He would just fall into the trap if he tried thinking along the lines of the caster's thought process and went searching for clues upstairs. Then, his subconscious would further believe that the scene before him was real and he would never be able to get out of it.

Buck scoffed. He knew these kinds of illusion spells very well.

Therefore, the only way to break out now... Was to continue investigating the first floor!

That's right, Buck had no plans to head upstairs.

What he had just deduced was exactly the thought process that the caster wanted the target caught in his spell to have, and most people would head upstairs. In reality, this was the trap.

There was no way the caster would just place the clues in a stately manner upstairs. He would ensure that the upstairs was more realistic, or set more traps that would create cracks in the barriers surrounding people's hearts.

Then slowly, step by step, it would cause the barrier around the victim's heart to crumble and break the heart's mental defense.

Therefore, through the process of reverse thinking, Buck deduced that only the first floor would be the most fake.

Even though the place was arranged and built so realistically and the large number of books seemed intimidating, it was the most

difficult part to craft in actuality. As long as he could find a flaw amongst one of the books, this illusion spell would break on its own!

Buck took a deep breath and pulled himself together. His mental state that was on the verge of crumbling was stabilized again.

He murmured to himself, “So what if I don’t have powers? I have the determination and wisdom I’ve gained through all those years. All of these will not disappear.

“Such illusions are far from enough to bring me down!”

He inched towards the bookshelf with vigilant eyes and his steps gradually got bolder.

The imposing aura of “Dead Kingdom” returned once again.

“Let me see what tricks you’re playing at,” uttered Buck as he drew a book from the shelf.

Lin Jie sensed that he had his first visitor in the dream realm he had constructed.

Silver had said that when a dream realm had not yet been fully constructed, or if ‘jurisdiction’ hadn’t been established, some creatures of the dream world or the souls of others in the real world might be inadvertently sucked into the dream.

“But don’t worry, these visitors do not pose any danger to you. If you see a dream creature that you fancy, you can even have it stay in your dream as a pet.” That had been what Silver said.

That was the reason why Lin Jie didn’t panic. He even observed this visitor’s actions with great interest through his birds-eye view.

He could not help thinking to himself, *Haa.. this fellow is kinda ugly...*

It’s like a fragmented being pieced together and kneaded into a

human shape, probably some strange dream realm monster...

Never mind, I'd better kill it quickly, otherwise, looking at it for so long would give me nightmares.

Oh... Right, I'm currently dreaming now.

Wait a minute. If so, could this be the source of the so-called nightmares? Dream realm creatures that invade the dreams of ordinary people? Lin Jie mused.

However, though he made a quick decision, Lin Jie did not act immediately. The actions of this strange humanoid attracted his attention.

That fellow seems scared. He tried to open the door to escape and even started concentrating... Perhaps this creature possessed some intellect.

However, this wouldn't change Lin Jie's opinion. He also wanted to experiment with the limits of his dream realm.

Of course, if it was a human soul, Lin Jie would be sure to send it out after a while. After all, he didn't need to use his brains to know full well what would happen if a body lacked a soul. He did not want to become a murderer for no apparent reason.

Hmm? Seems like it has stopped in front of the bookshelves?

Lin Jie was surprised to see the humanoid creature pick up a book.

Lin Jie's eyes widened. *It's even interested in Astronomy...*

Eh, in this case, could I also open a bookstore in the dream realm to serve dream creatures?

Before Lin Jie could continue developing this new idea, the humanoid creature's body suddenly became distorted. It shrieked like the person in the oil painting "The Scream". Then, the humanoid creature ignited, turning into a raging fire like a pile of firewood being lit before eventually crumbling into ashes.

Boss Lin, who was pumped with ambition mere moments ago, was

dazed and confused. He blinked blankly with no inkling as to what had just happened.

Under the cover of night, the transcendent beings, who had gathered because of the reward offered by the Church of the Dome, all became dormant at this moment. They looked up quietly at the Destructive-rank above who gave off a terrifying aura.

They were waiting for this Waning Crescent Apostle, also known as the “Reaper of Life” and “Dead Kingdom” amongst many monikers, to exact his revenge.

Everyone knew that the traitorous apostate who destroyed a church and killed two apostles overnight was currently in that obscure bookstore a short distance away.

Now, this confrontation was currently a silent contest in the eyes of all.

Once Buck takes action, it would be a great battle between Supreme-ranks.

However...

A minute passed, then five. Ten minutes, thirty minutes, an hour followed... There was no movement at all from the figure floating in the sky above.

“What’s going on?”

“Isn’t the great Buck going to make a move? It’s almost dawn...”

“What do you know? Are Supreme-rank battles so easy to fight? You have to look at the overall picture!”

“That’s impossible. Buck was obviously ready to take action and even progressed forward. Why would he suddenly stop for so long?”

“Look, he moved!”

As the transcendent beings were discussing among themselves, the figure in the sky finally moved.

The Waning Crescent Apostle in black trembled as his hands reached to his head, and he silently howled with all his might.

Then without a sound, there was a little spark and Buck was entirely turned into ashes that was swept up by wind in the night sky...

Nothing was left.

In an instant, all the transcendent beings present were dumbfounded, then their limbs went numb. A chilling fear clutched their hearts.

Those more timid ones felt their legs turn to jelly and they fell to the ground.

Others turned tail immediately and fled.

In the silence, everyone fled in panic and no one dared harbor the thought of entering the bookstore.

Chapter 158: The Moon Extinguishes Its Light For You

Chapter 158: The Moon Extinguishes its Light for You

158: The Moon Extinguishes Its Light for You

A Destructive-rank turned to dust right before their very eyes!

There was no earthshaking battle, no loud commotion, and even more so, no unnecessary nonsense.

An hour of speechless silence later.

Buck, the Waning Crescent Apostle, head of the Inquisition Office, was a Destructive-rank transcendent being known as “Dead Kingdom”. He was one of the top forces of the Church of the Dome, yet just like that, he met his death so abruptly.

He was arguably at the peak of Norzin’s pyramid of power hierarchy, yet under the watchful eyes of many, he had died as casually as an insignificant minion.

The two massive explosions that killed two apostles in succession would be shocking to most, but it would still be within the laws of logic.

After all, there was such a huge disturbance, and all transcendent beings could see for themselves.

Anyone could have sensed the extent of the two explosions and could clearly see the devastation that leveled the Seventh Parish Chapel. At most, transcendent beings could understand why even the apostles couldn’t withstand it.

After all, even if their combat prowess was multiplied several times, facing an attack of this degree would only result in death.

This kind of shock was the clearest understanding of the gulf

between themselves and such immense power.

Yet there hadn't been any activity in this situation, and the terror of the unknown was what was truly frightening!

Right in front of everyone, without any aetheric fluctuations nor prior signs, a Destructive-rank had died without even putting up the slightest bit of resistance.

This meant that the foe had utterly crushed him!

Crushing a Destructive-rank... No, Buck's resurrection was equivalent to being backed by Pope Rodney, who would definitely utilize his powers to give Buck additional blessings.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that he was a half-step Supreme-rank.

But even so, Buck had died here. He hadn't even entered the doors of the bookstore. This was just too terrifying.

As a result, the onlookers were all shaking in fear, and they scattered like animals fleeing a forest fire, wishing they had more legs or even wings.

If they ran too slowly, there was no telling that they wouldn't end up the same way as Buck!

As such, Claude, who had arrived in a hurry with his men, stopped where he was and watched the transcendent beings that were running for their lives.

With an exasperated sigh, he ordered his men to capture a few of them.

These transcendent beings were too busy fleeing with their lives that they never imagined that a bunch of people from Secret Rite Tower would suddenly appear at this moment. They were unable to deal with it amidst the panic and were quickly contained and brought before Claude.

The few that were captured could clearly recognize the blonde

youth before them and some had resentful looks, wondering who had snitched.

Others were anxiously wanting to run away, imploring their captors to let them run with pleading eyes.

Claude was not impressed by these bounty hunters, who made a living from bounty rewards and craved for the world to be plunged in chaos.

With a deadpan face, he interrogated them about the details, but his heart dropped when he learned that Buck was dead.

He was a step too late again!

But when he learned that Buck had died as delicately as the autumn leaves in the wind, he unconsciously let out a sigh of relief.

Claude couldn't help but look around and noticed that the houses in the surroundings were completely undamaged.

Boss Lin was truly a man of his word. He really didn't create a scene, and there wasn't so much as a scratch on the surrounding buildings.

Compared to the scene of the last great catastrophe, the technique this time was as gentle as spring rain.

However... From the way Buck died, it seems that Boss Lin had no need to make a big fuss over dealing with a Destructive-rank.

This wasn't even an opponent of the same level.

Just that...

When Claude approached the bookstore, he found the shop's windows tightly shut and lights off. The surrounding buildings were all in the same state, meaning that the occupants inside were sleeping.

Looks like Boss Lin was disturbed while he was sleeping and got grumpy from being woken up.

So, without even saying a word, he simply crushed the big one, and in the meantime, deterred those small insects circling around.

I guess I shan't disturb him either, I'll just come back in the daytime when the bookstore is open for business.

Claude glanced at the bookstore and reckoned he should go along with what he thought.

Although he was currently standing beside the bookstore, it was the owner of the bookstore who had called for him to come over a call.

But there was no guarantee Claude could handle the bookstore owner in his state of morning irritation, and he certainly didn't want to be dealt with as well...

Things probably wouldn't reach a point where it would be life-threatening, but it was perhaps not a good idea to visit now.

Just so happens that we are able to round up some of these bunch that have gathered. I undoubtedly saw a few wanted criminals that were probably trying to blend in and take advantage of the situation... That sort of counts as an achievement, I guess.

Claude called his men over to assign tasks and got them to move on their own, reminding them to reassure any alarmed citizens.

Still in thought, he muttered to himself, "So that's what Boss Lin meant when he said 'Theirs was a weak and powerless side and the situation was extremely dangerous,' and he needed help from the police."

In the eyes of Boss Lin, those bounty hunters that ran away in panic weren't part of the vulnerable people who needed help.

It was true that they were in an extremely precarious situation having to face such a terrifying presence like Boss Lin's.

Thus, he hoped that Claude could rush over and catch them before they could escape far.

When not making any moves, Boss Lin was, as expected, really

friendly and considerate.

Teacher and the special assessor sent by the council of elders didn't judge wrongly indeed.

But to his enemies, Boss Lin is truly a monster.

Claude cast his gaze towards the sky above. It was there that the Waning Crescent Apostle, Buck, was completely eradicated.

Then on, the night sky was empty, with nary a trace left behind.

According to eyewitnesses, there hadn't been any aetheric fluctuations at all...

Claude inhaled deeply, his gaze focused, and exhaled slowly. *What exactly was that level of technique?*

The reason why the Truth Union had assigned the rankings of Abnormal-rank, Pandemonium-rank, Destructive-rank, and Supreme-rank was that up till now, only transcendent beings of this level existed in Azir, and no one has been able to go any higher.

He now had some understanding why the council of elders had remained closed off till now, most likely deliberating on how to deal with and reach out to the bookstore owner... Perhaps what they really wanted to achieve was that level which didn't exist.

—

“Pfft!”

Rodney spat out a mouthful of blood, his face riddled with disbelief.

He stared at the staff in his hand... This time round, it didn't melt. On the contrary, there was nothing unusual with the lunar ornaments on it, except that the faint glow that emitted like moonlight had dimmed.

At the same time, he felt his connection with the moon's divine power was completely severed.

And on top of the consecrated altar, the writhing silver placenta contracted violently, as if letting out the sharp cries of a baby as it was being ripped apart and gushed out a huge amount of blood.

A tumor-like piece of flesh on the placenta burned up into a charred black layer.

Rodney, with his eyes wide with anger, threw himself at the sacrificial altar.

“No!”

Chapter 159: Enthusiastic Citizen Lin Jie

Chapter 159: Enthusiastic Citizen Lin Jie

Rodney stared at the altar before him, reaching out for the silver placenta with shaky hands, ignoring the blood all over him.

As the whole thing occurred, the silver placenta seemed to wither and now its squirming had gotten weak.

The charred portion was covered by the blood gushing out and what seemed like wriggling flesh started to regrow, but at a very slow pace.

As he stared at it, Rodney's grim expression suddenly softened. He wanted to touch the silver placenta but he didn't dare to and instead circled the altar.

"Are you frightened?" asked Rodney in a soft gentle voice. "Who hurt you?"

"Let your humble servant resolve your problem for you, please bestow me with your power once again..."

His voice was hoarse and slow. "Please, give them back to me..."

The silver placenta contracted violently several times, like a malformed heart. The blood gushing out and covering the charred part successfully formed fresh skin and healed the wound.

Only then did it emit the faint light once more.

Rodney's staff, as if in resonance, also lit up as well.

However the ornament representing the Waning Crescent didn't light up and remained dark.

Combined with the damage on the silver placenta, this meant it

wasn't just a temporary loss, but rather the power of the Waning Crescent was completely taken from the Moon itself!

Rodney's heart sank as well, but he still maintained his kindly expression and spoke gently to the silver placenta. "You've done well. Your humble servant will remain devoted to you for all eternity, destroying all your enemies, and for your everlasting protection and grace.

He watched the gradually calming silver placenta for a while more, then turned and summoned the Saintess.

The Saintess' beautiful face was pale and her eyes were laden with fear. She knelt down and exclaimed with a trembling voice, "Your Holiness... I... I can't find Buck's soul. It's like he no longer exists, someone has completely erased his soul!"

Buck had been dispatched to pursue and kill Vincent.

He had gone up against the bookstore owner in this process... Which meant that the current situation was entirely caused by the bookstore owner.

He had thoroughly slain Buck, and even destroyed the divine power straight from its source!

What sort of being is he?!

The entire Norzin had been deathly calm even when he had done such a terrifying deed. Even a Supreme-rank would still have to spare quite a bit of effort to kill off a Destructive-rank.

Destructive-ranks got this name because they could easily cause widespread destruction to an entire region. But how had he now removed the existence of a Destructive-rank as easily as cutting up some vegetables?

Rodney's face turned very ugly. He waved her off and said, "Got it, you can go off."

The Saintess took her leave.

Following that, the Full Moon Apostle entered and gave a full recount of everything that had happened in the vicinity of the bookstore witnessed by the watchful eyes of so many onlookers.

Rodney got more startled and furious the more he listened. He gripped the staff so tightly that his hand turned pale and his knuckles protruded.

Were there Supreme-ranks in this world capable of casually annihilating Destructive-ranks?

Or could the bookstore owner have already reached a fabled level that didn't exist?

“Impossible! That sort of level can only exist within the dream realm. Primordial Witches, gods. These were all in the dream realm. Nobody has achieved such a level in the real world!

“Otherwise... The thing that I've been chasing my entire life is wrong. I cannot be wrong!” Rodney gnashed his teeth and rambled with bloodshot eyes.

“Of course you can't be wrong.” A sudden voice said.

The voice was low, with a certain inexplicable magnetism and conviction.

Rodney turned his head and saw a black robed man standing in the corner. The man's face was blurred, as if shrouded by mist that only revealed his silver eyes. In the center of those black robes was a strange design that seemed full of magical power.

A long sword shrouded in flames.

Rodney immediately recited the name of the design in his mind—Path of the Flaming Sword.

The man in black strolled over and eyed the pope. “Rodney, are you so unsure of your ideals?”

“Of course I believe I'm right!” Rodney first refuted loudly, then hesitated for a moment. “But the bookstore owner, that Lin Jie

fellow. What the h*ll is going on? Vincent's power completely counters the Church of the Dome. You've seen it yourself, we have no way of dealing with him. What about your side?"

Rodney continued in a huff, "Didn't you all say that you would help me?"

"Fool!" The man in black glared at him. "Do you want the Church of the Dome, or do you want power that surpasses Supreme-rank?"

Rodney shuddered, realizing this was no place for him to be angry, and returned to his senses. The Pope lowered his disheveled head and replied, "Power, of course."

The black robed man then muttered, "Then stop caring about everything else and focus on preparations for the ceremony to help the moon escape. As long as it can leave the dream realm, we will be able to move to the next step of widening the dream realm's fractures and gaining its power.

"We will continue supplying you with materials, but now everything has to be sped up. The Ash Chamber of Commerce's side is about to be exposed soon and you still want to mess around?"

"Remember, your first duty is to help the moon emerge from the dream realm. Understood?"

Rodney nodded his head grudgingly. "Yes."

The black robed man went to the window and crossed his arms, gazing out into the dark night sky. "Lord Michael will take care of Lin Jie. He has foiled our plans twice already. As an enemy of Path of the Flaming Sword, we will naturally get rid of him.

"As for what Vincent intends to do, or what happens to the Church of the Dome, that is none of your business."

He turned around, revealing his sinister silver eyes. "Remember, we put you in this position of pope not to have you defend the Church of the Dome. You aren't qualified to do so."

Rodney recalled the identity of the man before him, one of the ten

founders of the Path of the Flaming Sword, now code-named 'Gabriel', the original pope that had founded the Church of the Dome at the beginning of the Third Era.

Compared to him, Rodney did indeed lack the qualifications...

The next day.

Claude worked all night and finally made it to the bookstore just as it opened for business.

The bookstore was the same as before, but there was one more person this time round.

The blindfolded priest was in much better spirits thanks to the newfound faith brought about by ***Eternal Doom***, as well as the countermeasures he had come up with Mu'en in the dream.

The two had come to a consensus and decided to establish a new faith.

The congregation, though, would still need to be worked on and would especially require the cooperation of Secret Rite Tower.

After entering, Claude first greeted Boss Lin and thanked the bookstore owner for his help and cooperation.

Enthusiastic citizen Lin Jie replied with smiles all around, "It's nothing, it's nothing. Upholding justice is everyone's responsibility."

He then pointed to Vincent beside him and said, "This is the person involved, you can ask him for the specifics. I'm still open for business so you guys can head next door to talk."

"Next door?"

"Mhm, I'm going to open an adjoining store next door," Lin Jie said with a wide smile. "Mu'en will be in charge."

Chapter 160: To A Pleasant Partnership

Chapter 160: To A Pleasant Partnership

Adjoining store?!

This caught Claude's attention and he felt that he had gotten hold of some extraordinary new information.

He had been busy dealing with the Blood Feast recently and hadn't noticed that the audio-visual store next door had closed down.

It seemed like a good thing for the boss of the audio-visual store.

Claude's heart skipped a beat when he recalled the words "Mu'en will be in charge."

Since Mu'en was the boss' assistant, which also meant she was likely being personally groomed by Boss Lin, it was already obvious who the 'adjoining store's boss' was going to be.

He didn't necessarily imply he was letting her set up her own business...

And now he's allowing her to get involved with the Church of the Dome matter.

If the church was really controlling the congregation with addictive substances, then its collapse would be unavoidable. At that time, a new faith would be needed to replace it, for the sake of the stability for Norzin citizens.

Even if there wasn't, other factions would have to recommend a new faith.

These words from the boss... hold a deep meaning indeed.

Being a bright young man with the ability to think on his feet, Claude thought of many possibilities in an instant.

But the specifics would only be confirmed after he checked with Vincent and Mu'en. Anyway, Boss Lin had already presented him with an answer and it would be stupid for him to guess blindly on his own.

But on second thought, Boss Lin's generous behavior seemed to have the intention of testing Secret Rite Tower's stance as well...

Claude thought to himself, *What's there to test? Our hearts are all yours. Don't worry, we are at your command. The council of elders are still craving for your bod- Ahem, no, I meant your realm of power.*

Of course, he wouldn't say such words out loud.

He wasn't close with Mu'en and Vincent, so they might not share certain information with him, but his teacher, Joseph, was on pretty good terms with Boss Lin.

Claude cleared his throat and asked tentatively, "What kind of adjoining store are you planning to open?"

Lin Jie thought for a bit, then aired his views, "Next door is slightly bigger. Hence, most of the books will be on the shelves here and there should be more than enough space for buying and borrowing.

"I will use next door as a book cafe serving refreshments, and with more seating space, that will be more convenient for chatting. As for customers, that would be up to Mu'en."

So, to expand the business and attract more customers, the two shops would have to split up their main business direction. The adjoining store's focus would be selling coffee and tea, whereas buying books would still take place in the main store. Just that the store next door provided a place for customers to read and rest.

And the hook was a beautiful store owner. Even just standing with an expressionless face would attract eyes.

And that was why attracting customers all depended on Mu'en. Presumably, she would naturally be more attractive than a fully-grown adult such as Lin Jie himself... At least appearance-wise.

So that's why... thought Claude to himself.

Does this mean that Boss Lin wants to develop the interactions between those who come to borrow books?

He had heard from his teacher that the bookstore's business was 'poor.' On top of that, there was a long period before the borrowed books were due.

Therefore, most of the time, patrons of the bookstore didn't have much chance of meeting fellow customers and so there was no interaction nor communication between them.

The owner of the bookstore had surely interacted and trained more people than what was known to them.

Thus, the power that this bookstore held might be beyond their imaginations. Just that it had probably been dispersed greatly that it hadn't been made known yet.

And now there was an adjoining store. Was this implying that this bookstore owner had an idea to establish an organization made up of the customers that came to borrow books?

Also, was he implying that Mu'en was to be the spokesperson of the bookstore by having her in charge?

With all sorts of speculations revolving in his mind, Claude followed Vincent and Mu'en to the new adjoining store.

The newly-refurbished unit had a very novel look, with an elegant and graceful layout. There were flower vines, several pots of magnolia, and decorative plants on the partitions everywhere. It was totally different from the gloomy atmosphere of the bookstore next door.

Of course, there was nothing bad that could be said about the Ash Chamber of Commerce's workmanship.

With some of Lin Jie's minor additions, based on the book cafes that he had previously seen, the new store had a modern style.

Compared to Azir, whose technology level was slightly askew and like the 80s and 90s, this pure and fresh literary style was very fresh and eye-catching.

The main bookstore, though, still remained the same as before. In the past, Lin Jie didn't have money to renovate it, but now he had already gotten used to it and didn't bother making changes.

The new store would be a great tool for sucking in money in the future, so Lin Jie had thought through it meticulously.

As someone used to seeing shops in the Central District that served the nobles and also transcendent beings, Claude was still rather amazed by this never-seen-before style when he walked into the new shop.

It wasn't that the store was that aesthetically pleasing, but it wasn't something he had seen before, so the experience stood out.

"Was this also designed by Boss Lin?" Claude tried to start a conversation with the frosty young girl.

While the bookstore's meek assistant was only responsible for serving drinks and sorting out books, Claude could sense an extremely dangerous aura resonating from her during the slight interactions he had with her.

This was especially prominent for Claude who was a sort of 'Police for Transcendent Beings' and often dealt with criminals.

He could sense a carefree and unrestrained vibe. She was like a sharp sword, but without a sheath. As long as she felt like doing something, she would definitely do it.

If it weren't for Boss Lin, this young girl might have likely been one of those wanted criminals and probably likely to be near the top of the most dangerous lists.

Mu'en nodded and surveyed the shop. A gentleness showed in her eyes as she said, "Yes, these were all designed and personally instructed by the boss himself."

During that period, Lin Jie came over every couple of days to supervise the renovations by the Ash Chamber of Commerce and made sure they met his expectations. He was engrossed and devoted to the renovation of the store and cared about it even more than the makeover of his own bedroom.

Claude could only be impressed. *Haa... Boss Lin is truly omniscient and omnipotent.*

Vincent seemed to be more silent than before. With a deadpan face, he picked a random seat and sat down before starting to recount his recent experience.

Vincent's and Mu'en's current mindsets were now to expose the Church of the Dome's crimes to the public first before proceeding to make known their new religion to the people from Vincent's parish whom he had saved in the past. Chances of the common folk believing would be greater because of the reputation he had garnered there.

But there was still one thing. They needed Secret Rite Tower's cooperation.

"This is not an issue. If the Church of the Dome reports to us that an evil faith has emerged, we can just let it drag on."

Claude continued on, "But the problem will be how you publicize the new religion. I believe you know the status of the Church of the Dome in Norzin better than I do. The teachings and name of the new faith have to be recorded officially as well."

"I've printed the materials for the official documentation. You just have to bring it back." Mu'en displayed her high efficiency as the bookstore assistant. She went on indifferently, "As for what means will be employed, you don't have to worry about that."

Vincent took out a crumpled cigarette from his pocket and said in a hushed voice, "After I escaped, I got the sample of the Holy Moon Essence from my former colleague. You can take it back to test its composition."

Although the priest was blindfolded, Claude felt a faint pressurizing sensation as though he was being stared at.

Another dangerous person...

“Very well,” Claude sighed. “Secret Rite Tower will do its best to cooperate. We won’t stand by and do nothing if the Church of the Dome is really doing such evil. However, attempting to eradicate this giant organization is an extremely difficult task and we would still need to work together.

“So then,” He reached out his hand and looked at the two, “to a pleasant partnership.”

Vincent subconsciously glanced at Mu’en but she didn’t move. He understood that he would be up against something far greater as he stood up.

The two of them shook hands firmly.

When Lin Jie was waiting alone in the bookstore, he suddenly received a call from Cherry.

He took out the communications device and thought about that little lady who said she would visit soon. It appeared that she had probably finished dealing with the matters that had delayed her schedule.

After answering, as expected, the little lady’s somewhat puerile voice sounded from the other end of the line, “Mr. Lin!”

Just listening to her voice, he could sense the vitality this child-like girl had.

However, he could hear some anxiousness and unhappiness in her tone. This was how she sounded like when she first sought him out for help.

“Cherry?

“Have you finally settled the matter at hand? Or do you need help again?” Lin Jie asked with a smile.

“Erm...” After hesitating for a while, she lowered her voice and said, “I’ve indeed encountered some troubles. My sources got a book from Congreve, that stupid brother of mine who has always wanted to seize power. However, no one has been able to understand the words on that book, so I would like to consult you about it.”

Chapter 161: Heart Enchantment Seal

Chapter 161: Heart Enchantment Seal

Congreve...

Lin Jie's eyes widened slightly, and his fingers subconsciously started tapping on the table as he fell into thought.

He knew that Cherry had relied on her own efforts to eke out a high position within the Ash Chamber of Commerce over the past few years.

—Of course, there were also rumors and old wives' tales that her father had a preference towards his illegitimate children, or that his mistress was his true love.

At the same time, one could imagine that Cherry's climb wasn't a smooth one. She still had a bunch of covetous siblings to contend with.

Furthermore, the Ash Chamber of Commerce was a business organization established by several families, split into three branches and each controlled by a different family that kept each other in check.

Therefore, if Cherry wanted to expand further, she would be faced with limitations both internally and externally.

And amongst the internal branch was a fellow named Congreve that spoke the loudest against her.

Of course, Congreve had reason and the capacity to do so. Before Cherry returned to the Chapman family, Congreve had been the person most likely to inherit the family business and already had a number of loyal supporters.

If it wasn't for Cherry's uncanny ability and rapid ascend, she would have been utterly suppressed right from the start.

Even now, Congreve's power wasn't to be underestimated. Although Cherry's advantage was overwhelming, she could still only stifle Congreve but not remove him from the reckoning.

He was always a risk and Cherry always had to be cautious about his movements.

And now, specifically mentioning a book gotten from Congreve's side meant that Cherry's call wasn't without purpose.

It was possible that the particular book documented or proved something that could be used to hurt Congreve or even make him lose his supporters.

Therefore, Cherry had sought out Lin Jie specially...

She had done so because of her trust in him, but... Cherry's current status meant that she would have many capable people at her side yet none of them had been able to understand this book.

While Lin Jie could boast to know a little, cryptography still wasn't within his professional scope.

Lin Jie could only reply tactfully, "I could give it a try, but I can only help you to the best of my ability. After all, I'm not particularly good in this aspect."

Cherry's voice brightened at once. "Fantastic! Thank you very much! I'll bring the book there right away!"

Hey, hey. No need to put it as if I've already solved the matter. Did this young lady even finish hearing what I said?

Lin Jie sighed with a sullen look on his face. *It sounded like she didn't really care about what the book contained and just wanted to come. Haa... truly child-like temperament.*

But as a responsible grown-up, Lin Jie had to concern himself with this matter.

“Wait a minute, you got that book from Congreve? And it’s something important to him and could thoroughly cause his downfall?” asked Lin Jie.

Cherry replied, “Yeah, yeah. According to reports from my sources, it’s highly likely that this book contains stuff that can incriminate Congreve and it’s more important to him than the other supporters.

“Also, it might be related to his unusual movements of late.

“I saw that the contents of this book was written in a certain ancient language, and thus, thought of you.”

She then added, “He’s been intercepting my shipments lately and making them go missing. But it’s being done so secretly that my sources aren’t able to get any information for the time being.”

Lin Jie muttered, “Don’t be too complacent. There’s no reason he didn’t have any precautionary measures in place. Even though your current status is rather stable, being unable to completely deal with him means that he still has strong support.

“Don’t take him too lightly. If he really was a fool, there wouldn’t be any reason for others to support him.”

He paused for a bit, raising an eyebrow. “From the tone of your voice, I’m guessing you didn’t face much difficulty obtaining the book?”

Cherry did a double take, immediately realizing that Lin Jie was reminding her that this book could be a trap.

Indeed... Bella had only reported on Congreve’s unusual activities and her sources had gotten this book just a few days after. The speed at which this unfolded was a little too quick.

Under any other circumstances, she would surely have wondered if it was staged.

But her contempt for Congreve was so deeply ingrained that she hadn’t given it too much thought.

Another thing to note was that her informant was the most reliable one on Congreve's side. Originally, this informant had been a trusted aide of Congreve's but was later brainwashed by Cherry's 'Heart Enchantment Seal' and became her die-hard loyalist.

'Heart Enchantment Seal' was the ability that Lin Jie had bestowed on her three years ago.

As long as she was able to have a certain extent of communication (degree depending on the other person's mental fortitude), Cherry would be able to compel the other party to conceive notions of 'sympathy', 'love', 'tolerance', 'respect', 'loyalty' and other such positive thoughts regarding Cherry.

Or perhaps, it wasn't necessarily always positive, but it would always be in a way beneficial to Cherry.

Her nickname 'Chapman Witch' was coined partially due to this, for most that interacted with her would subconsciously be 'infected' by her 'charm'.

This source had also been the same, so Cherry hadn't doubted his competence or loyalty.

Cherry hesitated. "There really wasn't much difficulty, but..."

But if this is really a trap, it means that something has gone wrong with my informant.

Viewing it from a wider perspective, this trap was rather obvious and that informant was a part of the brains in Congreve's faction and there was no way he wasn't in on a plan on this sort of level.

That meant to say, there was a possibility that Congreve had once again regained control of this source and turned him into a reverse agent.

Lin Jie shook his head and said, "It's better to hope for the best, but prepare for the worst.

"Have you ever considered that since you can't understand the contents of this book, it might be possible that he's written down

false information in it that can be used against you?”

Cherry's face darkened and she frowned. “If this book can thoroughly take him down and I continue studying it...”

Lin Jie's eyes narrowed and he interrupted, “Then that could be dangerous to you!”

Cherry felt goosebumps emerging all over her skin, for if Mr. Lin didn't exist, she would definitely take Congreve lightly given her personality and would have assumed this was a great opportunity to beat down her opponent for good.

Then, she would have continued trying to decipher it, and if her opponent was indeed smart and turned the tables claiming that this book was hers, it could really cause a world of pain.

That's not like Congreve's level...

Lin Jie could tell from Cherry's silence that she was probably a little nervous after this realization. Thus, he comforted her, “But, this is just my guess. Let me take a look at the book first, and my place is probably quite safe.”

Mhm, it's very safe indeed with an acquainted police officer here.

Cherry willingly agreed. “This had been my intention from the start. Just that looking at things now, Congreve might have really been scheming against me...”

She then sneered, “Very well, I will let him understand the true meaning of pain.”

Lin Jie frowned, thinking to himself that this tone didn't bode well. Years of a rich and pampered life seemed to have changed this young lady greatly, giving her a ruthless side...

Back then, he had given the book, ***Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*** to Cherry, hoping to sprout a little seed of love in the heart of this young lady that had suffered from family misfortune and to teach her that violence was always the last resort.

But from the look of things now, it seemed like Cherry had grown a little astray.

He cleared his throat and decided to help Cherry recall his initial intent.

“Do you still remember the words I said to you back then?”

Cherry nodded. “Of course! You told me to communicate with others using words of love and wisdom, not violence... Unless I can’t help it.”

That’s what he said back then. Isn’t this advice too straightforward?

Lin Jie gave a dry laugh. “Looks like you remember it rather clearly.”

Chapter 162: Main Character Aura

Chapter 162: Main Character Aura

“Of course. I’ve been abiding by your words all these years, communicating properly with everyone and winning over their hearts without ever resorting to violence.”

The lessons Mr. Lin taught her back then remained etched in her mind.

Using ‘Heart Enchantment Seal’ had always taken precedence for her and the effectiveness of this was more than violent means.

As long as she was able to speak with someone, the other party would unwittingly be affected by Heart Enchantment Seal. And the best thing about this was that even if the other party was directing from behind the scenes, there was no guarantee of being able to stop his or her subordinates from communicating with Cherry.

In this way, placing moles on the inside was convenient and well hidden.

And by the time the other party realized, he would already find himself surrounded by spies and these moles wouldn’t have the slightest trace of doubt for they would have already convinced themselves to change their views.

It would start with a slight feeling of compassion or admiration for Cherry, followed by being mesmerized by her and believing that she was a worthy master to follow.

In short, the effect was Cherry having a ‘main character aura’ that naturally drew people to her.

It was simply a scary ability that was akin to an infectious disease.

But there were times when the other party had a firm resolve or mental strength higher than her own. At such times, Heart Enchantment Seal wasn't very useful, but Cherry already had a bunch of devoted followers and letting them do the job was good enough.

Lin Jie's eyebrows scrunched together as he gave a heartfelt counsel. "Since you remember it well, how can you cause others pain just because you feel like it?"

"Think through things first, then try communicating with him and find out what bad things he has done. If he has really done something criminal and is unrepentant, then hand him over to the police, okay?"

"It just so happens that a Central Police Unit officer is here. He might be able to help with your investigations."

Lin Jie believed that Claude would definitely be delighted to garner two merits for his career in one fell swoop.

"You are right," Cherry humbled herself and became docile. "I got anxious. I ought to take him down through the correct means... Uhm, and hand him over to justice to set an example. This way, my supporters would have more confidence in me."

Congreve couldn't be taken down using such crude means. Doing so could greatly damage her reputation. After all, it was because of Heart Enchantment Seal that gained her so many supporters these few years who believed that she was destined and could lead the Ash Chamber of Commerce to glory and go up against Rolle Resource Development.

In the eyes of these people, her actions were naturally just and right. However, since Congreve shared the same father as her, such a glorious halo still wouldn't be able to hide such cruelty to her own sibling.

But if it were the other who struck first, she would just be eradicating evil, and sending Congreve to prison would be like a public execution, not just to transcendent beings but ordinary folk

as well.

That would be a massive torture for the prideful and arrogant Congreve.

At the same time, it would also be a warning to those who were restless.

Wonderful.

Lin Jie was very pleased and said, "That's right, bringing this matter public would greatly display your character and methods as well and it would help your career progress even more smoothly."

Cherry pressed her communications device excitedly to her flushed face and exclaimed, "Thank you for your guidance. I got careless and impatient."

Congreve had a lot of supporters and it would be a huge waste of resources getting rid of their support. Mr. Lin's teachings were right. She could completely convert these people over using 'love'.

"It's good as long as you understand."

A slight smile appeared on Lin Jie's face. Cherry had already learned the methods of adults while being exposed to society, but Lin Jie hoped that she wouldn't forget her original intentions, maintain basic principles, and never resort to unscrupulous means.

"Oh, right. Do you like the present I got you?"

She had heard from her butler that moments after he had given away the Coin of Misfortune, someone from next door had brought the Coin of Fortune to Boss Lin.

If it were anybody else, there was still a possibility that it was mere coincidence.

But with Mr. Lin, everything was inevitable. He must have foreseen the Coin of Misfortune being sent over, and thus obtained the Coin of Fortune at the same time.

Everything had been arranged plainly.

Lin Jie recalled the two-in-one coin and thought about how he had accidentally smashed Old Wil's glass cup on his visit.

Chuckling sheepishly, he replied, "I quite like it very much. It's a nice little thing, just that it's a little inconvenient to use in some places."

After all, he wasn't a fortune teller nor had an interest in divinity. Such a small plaything could only be kept for collection sake and occasionally played with.

Cherry's originally eager mood was somewhat dampened.

That's right, for someone who can easily control fate like Mr. Lin, the Coin of Destiny was probably of insignificant value.

Cherry puffed up her little face. "Don't worry. It was just a small gift previously. This time, I will definitely present with you the best gift that will satisfy you!"

"Uhm... You don't have to go to such an extent. That coin is not too bad already."

"Sigh~ I've already prepared this gift for quite a long time already..." The little lady's voice was so cloyingly sweet it was sickening.

Lin Jie could hear the emotion in Cherry's tone and realized it might be a little inappropriate to refuse. Thus, he replied, "Alright, I'll look forward to it."

Cherry immediately cheered up and expressed she was looking forward to it too.

At the moment, Lin Jie had an epiphany regarding the batch of goods Congreve had intercepted which had gone missing.

Perhaps this had something to do with the Church of the Dome. Holy Moon Essence seemed to have come from the Ash Commerce of Commerce.

Thus, he asked, “Do you know what was among the goods intercepted by Congreve? Do you have a list?”

Cherry lowered her voice. “I’m still investigating, but there’s quite a bit that’s uncertain.”

“Do you know what Holy Moon Essence is?”

“What is that?” Cherry was stumped for a moment before reacting. “Does Congreve’s interception of my goods have something to do with it?”

“Mhm, there’s quite a bit going on with the Church of the Dome. You’ve probably heard about it, right? They are using Holy Moon Essence to control the congregation and that substance comes from the Ash Chamber of Commerce,” Lin Jie repeated whatever he knew.

Lin Jie learned from the news that the two places where the recent explosions occurred were linked to the Church of the Dome, probably with relation to the matter of Vincent’s apostasy. The Church of the Dome had attempted to eliminate him and as a result, caused the two so-called ‘gas explosions’.

As someone in the know, Lin Jie now had viewed the previous few gas explosions differently.

Perhaps all these upper class folk liked using gas explosions to cover their murders.

As a daughter of an upper class family and an authoritative figure in the Ash Chamber of Commerce, Cherry would likely have some understanding of these truths.

Cherry’s eyes narrowed. “If that’s the case, I’m afraid there’s really someone pulling the strings behind Congreve.”

At this time, the bookstore’s door opened once more and Claude entered. “The Holy Moon Essence sample provided by Vincent has already been sent for a composition analysis. If we can find the transaction records of some of those substances inside, we would be able to trace its flow and find the people involved in the transaction

as well as where it was produced.”

Lin Jie put down the communications device and asked, “Have you all finished talking? What’s the plan?”

“I’ve already requested my superiors to take action and I’ll first wait for instructions.”

Vincent who came in behind said, “I’ll establish a new church and expose the evils of the Church of the Dome.”

“I’ll help,” chimed Mu’en.

Waving the communications device in his hand, Lin Jie said, “It just so happens that I was speaking with Cherry regarding this and have roughly guessed as much. When will the results be out?”

Claude answered, “Soon, there are experts amongst those that came with me...”

Before he even finished, a subordinate from outside entered with a file containing pieces of paper.

Claude took it and walked over to Lin Jie at the counter. “See, it’s really very quick.”

Lin Jie asked Cherry about the stuff she had managed to investigate and checked it against the composition analysis of the Holy Moon Essence.

As expected, the composition match is high.

This isn’t a coincidence. It’s highly likely that Congreve was directed to make a deal with the Church of the Dome...

Lin Jie thought to himself as he studied the information.

Claude added in, “There’s still another component inside which we are unable to determine its raw material. We also don’t know what it is, but...”

His face stiffened as he whispered, “It could be something alive.”

Chapter 163: Living Parasites

Chapter 163: Living Parasites

Something alive?

Lin Jie felt his skin crawl when he heard those words.

He glanced at the report in his hands... Followed by the small sample of the Holy Moon Essence in a plastic bag clipped to the paper, maintaining a forced smile as he edged back tactically.

He then placed the file on the counter and slid it towards Claude, indicating that he had read it.

When the words ‘something alive’ was said, the entire essence of Holy Moon Essence was no longer viewed the same way.

The deep-rooted dislike of addictive substances turned into a hair-raising sensation of seeing something gross.

One had to know that Holy Moon Essence appeared in the form of a ‘cigarette’, and the users needed to take the steps of ‘lighting’ and ‘inhaling’ to use it.

That also meant that if there was something alive amongst its components, there was a high possibility that it would enter the user’s body via smoke.

There would also be a chance that it could have been inhaled by others nearby a user ‘smoking’ it.

It was then that Lin Jie suddenly remembered that Vincent nearly lit a stick of Holy Moon Essence in the bookstore back then, and he had nearly done so right in front of him. Fortunately, he caught Vincent’s strange reaction, stopping him from smoking in public, and instructed him to not touch it again.

Regardless of what was actually inside, the idea of ‘something alive’ would thoroughly gross out anyone.

Lin Jie's gaze fell onto the sample once again. After calming himself down, Lin Jie mused, "That means to say, the addictive nature of Holy Moon Essence... could possibly be caused by this unknown component.

"It's not a drug addiction but is something like a parasite."

Claude nodded rigidly. "Yes, according to the analysis results, the other components had a stabilizing nature, similar to preservatives and did not contain anything responsible for the addictive function. Therefore this unknown component is the most likely culprit."

He turned towards the direct victim, Vincent, and said, "Father Vincent smoked the Holy Moon Essence for a short period of time. His symptoms weren't obvious at first, and he had stopped using it in time... This living organism is afraid of fire, so Father was extremely fortunate to have been burned. This resulted in them dying, so the priest did not suffer that great a poisoning."

Vincent nodded his head with a grave look on his face. He didn't give Claude any information regarding the Sun and the Moon which was a false god, so the latter probably assumed that he had mastered special fire powers.

"I still have to thank Boss Lin. If it weren't for your warning, I would have become one of those unknowing addicts."

Although he himself had completely destroyed the components of the Holy Moon Essence during his fusion with the Sun's Core, he still harbored great fear as well as anger and hatred in his heart.

Fear of what would have happened if he hadn't run into Boss Lin.

His anger and hatred were due to the fact that there were even more innocent people who were still using Holy Moon Essence without a clue and willingly inhaling these unknown organisms into their bodies.

Vincent was not the first priest to use Holy Moon Essence. There was one other batch before him, and many of the other priests he knew also used Holy Moon Essence.

He didn't know what the Church of the Dome had planned, but from their actions, he could deduce that it was definitely some sort of unspeakable goal.

Vincent had only discovered a small hint of the truth, and the Seventh Apostle, Vanessa, had sent someone to murder him indiscriminately without any trial.

It was well imaginable that even the slightest of whatever they were hiding wasn't allowed to be exposed at all.

Only they could expose everything!

This felt like a heavy burden on Vincent's shoulders. What spurred him on now wasn't just hatred but a sense of responsibility and duty.

It was just like how he used to help the parish community exorcise evil spirits out of the kindness of his heart... There were some things that were above hatred.

Vincent clenched his fist as his attitude underwent a complete change.

Lin Jie muttered, "So now, we still have to start with the Ash Chamber of Commerce... I just got a useful lead from Cherry."

He told them about the situation of Congreve's covert interception of the shipment, and the high probability of there being someone pulling the strings from the shadows.

If they could find out where that batch of goods had gone, they might be able to find out what the Church of the Dome was actually up to.

Claude finally understood. When he found out that the person on the other end of the communications device was Cherry of the Ash Chamber of Commerce, it felt as if he had seen a gold mine... 40% of the Intelligence Branch's funding came from the Ash Chamber of Commerce, who were truly their sponsors.

Back when Wilde was visiting the bookstore, Secret Rite Tower was

suspicious and felt that it could possibly be the stronghold of black magicians. However, the bookstore was backed by the Ash Chamber of Commerce and thus, they didn't dare carry out a search.

Even having a just cause was nothing in the face of their funding being cut.

Of course, now he was further looking forward to what sort of useful leads that Cherry could bring.

Lin Jie picked up the communications device again and said, "Cherry, did you hear all that just now?"

Cherry replied, "I did."

Her tone sounded a tad too excited. Something alive? The situation surrounding the Church of the Dome was far too interesting and it sounded like they had this plan to overthrow the Church of the Dome and start a new church.

Cherry supported this wholeheartedly.

This was because the Church of the Dome was an established power on the same level as the Ash Chamber of Commerce with close connections with Rolle Resource Development Company and often dealt with them.

Although the Ash Chamber of Commerce branch that Cherry headed had numerous warehouse reserves as well, there was nothing that could be done if the other party didn't pick theirs.

Hence, that was one effortless way for Cherry to make money.

But if they were to establish a new faith and if the ones starting it were Boss Lin's customers, it was the perfect opportunity to monopolize the operation if they could really replace the Church of the Dome.

She could not wait to arrive at the bookstore.

Parties on both ends of the communications device had eager anticipation and awaited the investigation to continue.

And with the help of Mu'en, Vincent began his first preaching...

Church of the Dome, the Central Chapel.

A group of priests were waiting for the Pope's summons.

They were all blindfolded, but it was clear from their expression that they had a different kind of exhilaration and their faces were flushed from excitement.

Most of these congregations were ordinary priests and nuns like Vincent. The most they would get to see the upper hierarchy would be seeing an apostle and receiving a simplified baptismal rite at a new apostle's appointment.

The Saintess and Pope, on the other hand, could only be seen from afar once every year during the ceremony for the day of the god's birth.

In their hearts, all they had was admiration, worship, and longing for their leader.

Now as humble ordinary congregations, being able to meet the Pope was simply the greatest honor they could have. The priests tried to suppress their excitement, but their faces and necks were red, and some were even trembling.

The beautiful Saintess watching from the side smiled warmly and called out a few names. "The few that I've called can follow me in first while the rest are to wait here for a while."

"Yes!"

Those priests and nuns whose names were called immediately responded and drew the curve of the crescent moon on their chest before following the Saintess to the inner room.

Being blindfolded, they could not see that the marks on their red cheeks and neck were indistinctly twisting and squirming as if it were blood vessels, and also like... worms.

Chapter 164: Please Descend

Chapter 164: Please Descend

The bunch who were called entered the solemn inner room silently.

Even though deep down they were nervous and excited, the most basic of etiquette still had to be reserved. After all, this was the Church of the Dome's most sacred place, a place for worshipping all the holy relics and statues of the past popes.

In most circumstances, only the pope and Saintess were allowed inside. Even the Seven Apostles weren't able to enter easily.

While this group of priests didn't know why they had been summoned, they were now filled with a sense of unmeasured pride, for being able to enter the inner chamber of the Central Chapel was something an ordinary clergy member could brag about for an entire lifetime.

Inside the inner chamber.

The white altar in the center held the silver placenta, while niches in the surrounding walls were full of statues of past popes and some other sacred artifacts.

The place was dignified and solemn.

And the pope, clad in a magnificent robe and topped with an exquisite and towering white hat, stood on the steps before the altar with his golden scepter in hand.

Rodney watched the neatly lined-up priests get on their knees to bow with the usual benevolent smile on his face. With a warm, wizened voice, he said, "Please rise. There's no need to be so formal. All who are blessed by the moon are my children and are treated equally by me."

This made the priests feel a sense of warmth, and all nervous

tension they had was gently soothed by an invisible spiritual force, amplifying their admiration and respect for the pope.

Rodney gazed at everyone with a smile which brightened when he saw those indistinct, protruding, and twisted marks on their faces and necks.

He stepped forward and spoke slightly louder, "You must all be curious as to why I have summoned all of you here."

Nobody answered, nor did anyone dare to.

Although the pope was so benevolent and affable, this only made them aware of the distance between themselves and His Holiness.

Rodney didn't plan to let them answer either and continued, "You should all know that this is the most hallowed place in the Church where ordinary people cannot set foot, dedicated to the three sacred artifacts and the statues of the former popes.

"Today, you have the privilege of entering here because you have one thing in common that sets you apart from the rest."

One thing in common that sets us apart from the rest?

This seemingly contradictory statement caused this bunch of clergy to show puzzled looks. But after a lackluster day of service in the Church of the Dome, there wasn't anything that made them stand out, yet someone immediately associated it with something they had done differently from the rest recently.

One of the priests got visibly excited and probed cautiously, "Your Holiness, is it because of Holy Moon Essence?"

Rodney nodded, his smile unchanging. "That's right. First, I must tell you the truth about Holy Moon Essence."

He turned and paced around the altar and reached out to gently caress the silver placenta, whispering, "Holy Moon Essence is nominally a meditation aid, but in reality, is used to filter out qualities. Its main component is from a sacred artifact... Since the very first time you all used Holy Moon Essence, someone has been

secretly observing the changes in your bodies till now.”

Hearing they had been watched didn’t cause them to have any conflicting sentiments. On the contrary, they felt delight at having been watched by the upper hierarchy.

And the following sentence ignited their emotions—

“Congratulations to the few of you present. You are the lucky chosen ones.”

Rodney raised his voice. “Today, you will have the privilege of getting to touch a sacred artifact!”

Touch... a sacred artifact?!

The bunch of priests froze momentarily from disbelief before a sense of extreme fervor overcame them.

This was like a dream, being able to enter the inner chamber and getting the opportunity to touch a sacred artifact. It was akin to a commoner suddenly having the opportunity to enter the palace and touch the throne with their own hands—an unimaginable fantasy that could only be dreamed of.

And a component of Holy Moon Essence came from a sacred artifact. Wasn’t that the same as them having a sacred artifact within themselves? This was simply a great honor!

Instantly, all of them felt great delight, their faith towards the Church and the Moon reaching its peak.

Following that, the first priest knelt down, followed by the others as they recited the baptismal rites.

Rodney smiled kindly. “The Moon will always protect you for all eternity.

“Now, come...”

Overwhelmed by this great opportunity, the priests hadn’t realized that their beloved pope had only said that Holy Moon Essence could

filter out qualities, but hadn't said what those qualities were nor the reason why those screened and selected had to touch the sacred artifact.

With the Saintess leading them, the devout priests formed a circle around the altar and reached their hands towards the silver placenta in the center.

There were exactly seven of them.

Moments after each of them had touched the sacred artifact, the silver placenta suddenly emitted a silver light with a vaguely psychedelic tint.

Rodney stood nearby, watching the scene without any change of expression.

He raised his hand with 'Ancient Ring', one of the three sacred artifacts, on his finger. "By the ancient vow, during the period of Full Moon, the Sleeping Moon Child will be reborn here. The placenta, the fetus, and the womb are ready. The passage has been established. May the Moon open its eyes, may it stretch its body and may it breathe."

He recited the incantation seven times, using a different moon phrase each time.

Every time this was recited, a complex circle of runes would light up from the central altar and expand in every direction, quickly spreading across the entire inner chamber and eventually converging and disappearing through the circular window at the center of the ceiling.

After the final round of incantations concluded, the entire inner chamber was covered in shimmering runes. And only at this moment would someone see that the entire layout of the inner chamber resembled the shape of a woman's womb if they were to look at it.

The entirety of the Central Chapel's inner chamber was basically a complete, large-scale sacrificial altar!

Those seven priests were in the center of its radiance and could no longer move.

That placenta emanated a peculiar silver light that seemed alive, entangling around their bodies, leaving the seven priests with perplexed and terrified expressions.

“W-what is going on?!” The only priest who had dared to open his mouth had spoken in that moment of bewilderment and difficulty, the blindfold on his face falling off in his struggle.

Rodney was not bothered and only said, “We may begin. Please descend.”

Before the priest could react, he heard a shrill scream from beside him.

He was unable to turn his head, so he could only do his best to inch his eyes in the direction of the sound. In his peripheral vision was an unforgettable image that would remain for the rest of his life.

A nun being engulfed by light had her entire body quickly swell up like an inflatable balloon. Like red balloons filled with yellow pus and fluid, streaks of blood traces protruded from her skin from time to time, as if writhing marks swimming between her skin and flesh.

These writhing marks were increasing and becoming more and more obvious. It looked like there were hundreds of them. They were crowding, squeezing, and nibbling away. In the midst of the nun’s screaming, she became a human sac filled with these tentacles. Her body was distorted until her eyeballs were squeezed out of their sockets and rolled to the ground before she turned completely silent.

At the same time, it was also the last scene that this priest would ever see.

He felt severe pain afflicting him. Lowering his head slightly, he saw that his own stomach was already split open, his intestines seemed to be alive and twisting wildly.

Vaguely, he saw his eyes on his own intestines open and looked at

him.

Chapter 165: The Same Dream

Chapter 165: The Same Dream

Rodney smiled as he watched the seven ‘lucky’ priests standing around the altar turn into heaps of mangled flesh in the blink of an eye. Blood splattering in all directions stained the white altar a bright red, and various still-active organs lay writhing on the floor.

This sealed inner room was instantly filled with the pungent scent of blood and the statues of past popes all around seemed to turn from solemn to eerie.

Haa... Haa...

Expressions of fear and panic were the last thing on their faces as they struggled till their eyes gradually dulled as they lost their last breaths.

Rodney strode to the altar, and with great interest, observed the last priest that was still struggling to remain standing.

The main component of Holy Moon Essence was bits of the sacred artifact, ‘Sleeping Moon Child’ which when roused, would modify its host to form a suitable dwelling for the divine to descend, regardless of whether in flesh or spirit.

This was the ‘fetus’.

Needless to say, the silver placenta placed atop the altar in the center was the ‘placenta’.

The entire inner chamber, with runes inscribed all over, was an altar itself and the ‘womb’...

When the ‘fetus’, ‘placenta’ and ‘womb’ all existed together, ‘God’ would be born from the fetus!

Rodney had a look of rapt ecstasy as he watched this scene. This was an actual god that was worshiped for thousands of years.

Today, it shall truly descend from the dream realm to the real world and would truly be gazed by people and be worshiped!

Gakk! Gakk!

Tentacles sprouted from the priest's chest dancing wildly as it tugged at both ends of his body, seemingly trying to widen the cavity from which these tentacles were growing out from.

Pfftt...

That priest kept coughing out blood, moving his hands frantically as if trying to grab onto something. He struggled for a good fifteen minutes before finally crashing to the ground from exhaustion.

And when he fell, those tentacles seemed to lose all impetus. Shortly after, they turned limp and slumped to the ground as well. On closer look, those slimy, bloody tentacles seemed like intestines.

Silence resumed. Besides corpses strewn on the ground, Rodney and the Saintess were the only two living beings in the room.

At first, Rodney continued staring fixedly at the corpses on the ground with a gaze of longing anticipation. But as time passed, the excitement on his face gradually disappeared and was eventually replaced with disappointment and fury.

All dead... That meant... not a single one of them could withstand the arrival of the Moon. They had all failed!

Baam!

Rodney slammed his fists on the table and beckoned for the Saintess standing at the side. With a look devoid of emotion, he ordered, "Sheryl, call the next batch in."

"Yes." The Saintess withdrew from the chamber, putting on a kindly smile as she went to select the next batch of priests.

"It's alright, it's alright..." Rodney went over to the altar and placated the placenta that was shaking and giving off faint cries. The blood and viscera on the ground was absorbed by the white

altar till there was not a drop left and everything was sparkling clean.

With so many more ‘fetuses’, there was bound to be a lucky one.

“Time waits for no man. Looks like it’s time to mass distribute Holy Moon Essence...” muttered Rodney to himself.

Annie Tuttle was an ordinary housewife. She had two kids and a husband who was a baker.

At dinner time, while coaxing her children to eat, she heard the news report from the television—Recently, the Church of the Dome had an incident where a priest committed apostasy, and through the use of explosives of unknown origins, blew up two churches that resulted in at least 1700 casualties, including Father Terrence of the Chapel of Charity.

“The people of the Seventh Parish should know Father Terrence well. He was... a father figure to Vincent, who turned his back towards this kindness and lost his humanity, heading straight to the Chapel of Charity after committing apostasy and killing...”

Annie frowned and picked up the remote to switch to a different channel. This was already the third time she was seeing such news.

“Haa...” She sighed.

Father Vincent had helped out her family before. There were weird sounds coming from the attic and walls some time after moving in and so, they had suspected the work of evil spirits.

But after Father Vincent was invited to take a look, he discovered that it was actually due to the bread crumbs and other desserts from the bakery that led to rats breeding and living within the walls.

Father Vincent had helped to hack open the walls and cleaned out the attic to drive all those rats away.

Despite doing something seemingly irrelevant to his job, the

amiable priest had just laughed and said that “he would need to serve the faithful wherever the Moon shone.”

Annie couldn't forget how the priest with dust all over his face from cleaning out the attic had pulled out a bottle of rat poison and joked that this was how holy water looked like.

How could a kind and caring man like Father Vincent be capable of blowing up two churches and murdering a man who was like a foster father to him.

She wasn't willing to believe Father Vincent was such a person, but her faith in the Church of the Dome made her waver.

Annie shook her head. She was just an ordinary person with enough things to worry about in her daily life. Such matters were too distant to her and there was nothing she could do even if she chose to believe.

“Mom, mom, mom, mom...” Her two children tugged at her clothes again, egging her to go play.

“Alright, alright.”

Annie pacified the two young ones and smiled at her husband. In the calm and warm setting, the family prepared for bed as usual.

...

“Where am I?”

Annie gazed at her surroundings in astonishment. The quiet street was devoid of people and the night was dark. In the distance, there seemed to be the faint noise from far away.

However, Annie remembered that she should have already fallen asleep.

So... I'm dreaming?

Annie trudged forward in a daze, vaguely experiencing a sense of familiarity. She looked up and saw the signboard of the Chapel of

Charity.

Chapel of Charity?!

She finally remembered! *Wasn't this a street nearby the Chapel of Charity that Father Terrence presided?*

The news reports were accurate in that the people of the Seventh Parish knew Father Terrence well. People of Annie's age would come to the Chapel of Charity for treatment when they were young.

The vague memory became clear in an instant and Annie instinctively wanted to knock on the door.

But before she could move, a figure appeared around the corner, making Annie jump.

She watched in startlement as that figure stumbled and fell at the door. The person's body was charred black and covered with blood. Two bloody holes existed where eyes were supposed to be, but Annie recognized this face.

Father Vincent!

Annie covered her mouth as her eyes widened in disbelief.

But what happened next really overturned her perception of whatever she knew...

The next day.

Annie woke up early but still laid in her bed, staring blankly at the ceiling.

She didn't know what that dream meant, but the ghastly Waning Crescent Apostle, deceased Father Terrence, and Father Vincent who wept soundlessly within flames were all fresh in her mind.

A chilling thought kept running through her mind. *Could... Could this be the actual truth?*

“Waa! Mummy, help! I’m scared!” The kids woke up in tears, wailing as they recounted their nightmare incoherently.

Goosebumps appeared on her skin as she listened to her children. The words used by the kids differed, but on a whole, what they had experienced was exactly the same as her dream!

There’s no way this is a coincidence!

Could it be Father Vincent’s vengeful ghost?

But why did Father Vincent look like that in the dream?

Was it the reason why he committed apostasy?

Another church...

Was all that happened in the dream real?

The distraught Annie led her children out to the living room and saw her husband sitting on the sofa in a daze. His blank expression made her ask, “George, did you have that dream too?”

George froze, and his expression turned grave. “Did you all dream about it too?”

The two adults stared at each other, realizing that something wasn’t right as a chill went down their spines.

George gulped and forced a smile. “Let’s not panic first. Perhaps we ought to head to church...”

However, his voice trailed off towards the end. If everything in the dream was true, could the Church of the Dome be trusted?

Ring, ring...

The phone in the living room rang and Annie went over to answer it. It was her good friend Athena.

She was also a believer of the Church of the Dome and had also been helped by Father Vincent in the past.

That plump middle-aged woman asked hesitantly, “Annie, did... did you all have that dream?”

Chapter 166: Book Cafe Tonight

Chapter 166: Book Cafe Tonight

Annie felt numb when she heard what Athena said.

The line, “Did you all have that dream” had at least two defined implications.

First, she had used “you all”, meaning that she wasn’t just referring to Annie, but her entire family.

Secondly, “that dream” meant a particular dream, which was the same one as she had.

All in all, it meant that Athena knew, or for some reason assumed that Annie and her family had the same dream last night.

But the scariest and hardest-to-understand part was — How had she known?

Annie swore that it had only been about 10 minutes since she had woken up and she was certain she hadn’t done anything in her daze that might have let on.

Unless Athena had installed surveillance measures here... But she wasn’t such a person nor would she have been instantly able to know about it even if there were!

An even more absurd conjecture popped up in Annie’s mind and she felt her heart pound rapidly.

With a trembling voice, she asked, “What’s wrong Athena, why do you ask?”

Athena sensed something from Annie’s tone and immediately answered excitedly, “Do you all also see the Chapel of Charity, Father Vincent, the old priest, and that reaper... And the huge fire!”

Her words were slightly incoherent and Annie could practically

imagine the spittle flying from her good friend's mouth. However, right now, she was more concerned about what Athena had just said.

She used the word, "also"!

She had also dreamed those things. It's the same dream!

"Yes." Annie felt a shudder throughout her body. She took a deep breath in a bid to forcefully calm herself down and continued, "Yes. George and the two kids also had the same dream."

Then, she heard Athena say, "I also had this dream. Not just me, but Paul too!"

Paul was Athena's husband.

Annie felt that things were a little out of hand. A mere coincidence could no longer explain this. Could it be the malignant spirit of Father Vincent... But the Church still had a bounty on him which meant that Vincent wasn't dead yet.

What was going on?!

On the other end of the call, Athena also echoed her disbelief as well, "Oh my goodness. What's happening?!"

Annie clutched the phone and asked, "Since you are calling, do you know something?"

When encountering such circumstances, it was normal to choose to call someone close.

But normal logic suggested that the first question asked should be what to do in the face of such a situation instead of asking the friend whether she had also had the same dream.

Asking such an indicative question meant that Athena probably had some key information!

Athena hushed her voice, adding in an air of feigned mystery. "It isn't just you and I. There are at least a hundred people who had

the same dream at the same time!”

At least a hundred?! Annie's eyes narrowed.

This number was startling. She immediately asked, “How do you know this?”

“I’ve been told that they are currently preparing a secret gathering for those who’ve had the dream to discuss it. I even heard that those who’ve had these dreams were all people that Father Vincent had helped before.”

Athena continued, “Do you think what we saw in the dream was real?”

“A secret gathering to discuss it? What time? Where? How many people? What do they intend to do?”

“6 p.m., tonight at the newly opened book cafe on 23rd Avenue. I heard that they are expecting only a few dozen or so,” Athena muttered. “As for what... How would I know...”

She paused, and whispered, “But I also heard that there’s a Central Police Unit officer. Apparently he knows some inside information on the Church of the Dome which has something to do with Father Vincent.”

Annie’s heart skipped a beat. “There’s a Central Police Unit officer involved in this gathering?”

“Yes!” replied Athena. “That’s why I kind of believe this dream now. How could a good man like Father Vincent be what the news portrayed him to be!”

She then asked, “So... Will you be going?”

Annie hesitated for a bit and glanced at her husband. “Let me think about it.”

She had a vague feeling that this choice could be extremely important and might have a huge impact on her life.

“Alright! Think about it properly before telling me your decision. I’ve already signed up and will be in charge!” said Athena. “I’m well-versed with 23rd Avenue and occasionally purchased discs at that audio-visual store. That gloomy bookstore next door didn’t seem to have any business, yet it’s the audio-visual store that has turned into a book cafe...”

Annie had a lot on her mind as she listened to her friend’s chatter.

In fact, Annie and Athena’s estimations couldn’t be more wrong.

There were more than a few hundred people who had the same dream last night. Vincent had used Mu’en’s power to expand her dream realm to its limits, so all the people he had associated with were all included.

And in his tenure as a priest for several decades, the people he had helped numbered more than 3000.

“Amongst them, approximately a thousand would choose to believe, most of the remaining ones would be doubtful, some would choose to remain silent, while a few would report it to the church.”

Vincent assessed the situation by taking in everyone’s reactions from within the dream realm.

These were all within his expectations.

These thousand or so would be the new faith’s first batch of believers.

But he couldn’t lead a thousand people straight away, and electing ‘apostles’ to spread the gospel was a necessary process.

That’s right, the secret gathering in the adjoining book cafe was to choose apostles.

Out of the dozens of participants, ten would eventually be selected to be apostles of the Sun God’s faith.

The so-called Central Police Unit officer was there to show the friendly stance the knights of Secret Rite Tower had.

The truth that was to be revealed was of course the information they had gathered that could bring down the Church of the Dome.

Vincent left the dream and opened his eyes to see Claude standing before him.

The latter had just received a report from a subordinate that was acting undercover and blending in with the common folk. Claude handed over the list of participants and relevant details regarding those attending the rally, then patted Vincent on the shoulder. "From here on, it will be up to your performance."

Shutting his eyes and taking a deep breath, Vincent nodded. "I won't let Boss Lin down."

Cherry was in high spirits, humming a little tune and skipping about on the journey to the bookstore.

"Woo-hoo!"

Her feet hopped over a pothole on the road as she turned around and urged, "Hurry up, Bella! I can't wait to see Mr. Lin again!"

Cherry's curved brows and little protruding canines were especially adorable, making her seem much more lovable.

Following behind with an exquisite black leather suitcase, Bella called out somewhat helplessly, "Mistress, Mr. Lin is not going to run away. Please calm down."

Cherry placed her hands on her hips and raised her head. "I'm not going to calm down. I just want him to know how much I've missed him."

Her gaze slid to the suitcase and her lips curled upwards. "My present will definitely be the best and most incomparable one. It will let him feel my intense passion!"

Chapter 167: There's Really No Need For A Gift

Chapter 167: There's Really No Need For A Gift

The calm and reliable head maid Bella smiled at her spirited mistress and followed after her with the heavy suitcase in tow.

The dark red runes flickered across the surface of the black box, hinting that it was no usual suitcase.

These runes were very similar to the sigils painted and engraved on the brass box where White Wolf stored the original formula, but they looked more advanced with additional sigils added as well.

In short, this was a sealing array, which was used to prevent the object's aura from leaking out as well as preserving it well.

Moreover, its craftsmanship was exquisite, clearly the work of a high-level white magician.

Bella knew naturally that Cherry's confidence was not groundless. She had spent three years carefully preparing a gift and it was an immeasurable wonder indeed. The Ash Chamber of Commerce thought so as well, even with its vast financial resources and connections.

Compared to the item in this suitcase, the Coin of Misfortune given by the butler previously was just a mere appetizer, for it paled in comparison to the item in the suitcase.

This gift was definitely grand, even for a terrifying entity like Boss Lin who was believed to have been around for ages.

As she stepped out of the alley, Cherry suddenly stopped, her cheerful expression freezing as she stared at the street opposite the bookstore.

This was where that ‘gas explosion’ had taken place — Of course, transcendent beings all knew that this was the aftermath of the battle between the great elf sage and the leader of Scarlet Cult.

The entire area had been turned into ruins and was now being rebuilt.

In terms of scale, it was much better than the sparse old shop-houses previously.

Of course, Cherry didn’t care about all these.

Her sharp gaze fell on the construction-in-progress sign.

The words ‘Rolle Resource Development Company’ were imprinted in striking yellow on the sign.

This meant that the construction site directly opposite the bookstore was a project contracted by Rolle Resource Development.

“Why would Rolle Resource Development be here? This is such a remote place close to the slums. Weren’t they always disinterested in developing such areas?”

Cherry frowned and felt uneasy.

She felt as though a group of greedy goblins had come eyeing an absolutely secret treasure land that only she knew about previously...

And on closer look, she discovered that the goblins had not only circled out a large area nearby but had also started developing a spot, which was only a short distance from her treasure.

It made her heart run cold.

Cherry clenched her little fists as she stared at the sign with gritted teeth. “Damn it, I was too busy investigating Congreve and wasn’t paying attention to Rolle Resources Development’s actions... I can’t believe I didn’t find out about this earlier. These goblins would not do stuff that never benefits them.

“I have investigated this area a long time ago. It has no commercial value at all, so... The only thing that could attract Rolle Resources Development’s attention is Mr. Lin.”

Given her keen senses and intelligence, Cherry immediately realized this.

The treasure land that she had been hiding for so many years was now being coveted by these ugly green goblins!

“If it weren’t for my unwillingness to disturb Mr. Lin, would there even be any room for Rolle Resource Development?”

“Damn it!”

Cherry stamped her feet angrily. Unfortunately, her short and petite figure seemed totally harmless as if she could only jump high enough to give a person a knock on the knee.

Even if her owner was suddenly spouting out strange metaphors like goblins, Bella kept her cool and remained smiling.

She leaned lower and asked, “Mistress, do you want me to investigate who initiated the project as well as the person in charge?”

Huff huff...

Cherry puffed up her cheeks in anger and took quite a while to calm down. “Investigate it!” she huffed.

“Find out everything! No one, not even Rolle Resources, can ever rob me of my things!”

“Yes.”

Cherry sorted out her expression, raised her chin, and said, “Regardless of whatever, I’m the one who got to know Mr. Lin first. Besides, Mr. Lin will be very pleased with today’s gift. Their sneaky little tricks can’t compare to it.”

Humph, wanna get closer to Mr. Lin using these drastic measures?

Dream on!

They didn't understand Mr. Lin at all. What he hated the most was being disturbed when his bookstore was opened. After all, he was very keen on playing the role of bookstore owner, which could also be regarded as his biggest interest.

And if this interest of his was interfered with, for example, having people pretending to be guests enter the bookstore, such behavior would certainly be severely punished by Mr. Lin.

Cherry's mood lightened up again.

She walked briskly to the door of the bookstore, placed her hand on the door, and pushed it open slightly.

Cherry could feel her heart beat so fast as though it was about to come out of her throat.

After three years, she was finally here again.

The biggest turning point in her life, and also the starting point of everything.

Jingle.

The familiar sound brought slight tears to her eyes and her body trembled gently.

The door opened and everything in the bookstore came into view.

Bookshelves full of books, the nearby counter, stairs at the back, and the black-haired young man sorting out books on the shelf while reading one on his own — all of it was lit up by the dim light.

Everything was almost the same as it had been three years ago.

Swish...

Lin Jie flipped over a page and when he looked up, he saw the little lady standing in the doorway gazing adoringly at him.

“Cherr...”

Before he could finish, the little lady shot at him like a gust of wind and rushed into his arms.

Thud!

The sound of her head colliding with his chest rang out all around.

Lin Jie had instinctively opened his arms to catch her but still could still feel a dull pain in his chest.

A weeb who never exercised would have been knocked down on the spot, thought Lin Jie to himself.

This small lithe body really packs a punch.

He patted the tightly-clinging Cherry on the back and said soothingly, “Alright, alright. Everything’s fine.”

But at the same time he thought to himself, this little girl hadn’t changed at all since three years ago.

He assumed that Cherry had learned to be independent in these past three years, but she was unexpectedly still a crybaby after all this time.

After hugging Lin Jie for some time, she suddenly realized that she had forgotten her manners.

Embarrassed, she took a few steps back. Pinching her dress, she stammered nervously, “I’m sorry, Mr. Lin...”

Although she boasted about knowing Lin Jie for the longest time, this kind of behavior was overly excessive and far too intimate.

She worried that Lin Jie would be angry.

Lin Jie couldn’t help himself from laughing and squatted down to pinch her cheeks. “It’s alright. We haven’t seen each other for a long time.”

Cherry's heart pounded rapidly, and she became giddy just staring at his smiling face, unable to say anything.

Fortunately, Bella walked into the bookstore and placed the black suitcase on the counter. She bowed with her hands crossed in front of her. "Mr. Lin, as promised, we've come. I hope you will forgive us if we have acted rashly. This is a gift from my mistress."

Lin Jie walked back to the counter and looked at the suitcase. It was the sort of sealed suitcases that always seemed to be filled with stacks of banknotes that one saw in many TV dramas.

He could not help but smile. "Your visit is more than enough. There's really no need for such a valuable gift..."

Chapter 168: Ancient Dragon Heart

Chapter 168: Ancient Dragon Heart

Lin Jie was not the least bit interested in what was contained within the heavy, black leather suitcase.

Neither was he looking forward to the blissful image of Cherry opening the suitcase's buckles with a clack and pouring out stacks of banknotes.

It wasn't that Lin Jie was a saint who viewed money as dirt, but this was just absolute nonsense.

His unchanging friendship of three years with Cherry could not be measured with just money.

And money talks would often damage relationships.

After all, whether it was a gift or not didn't matter. What was important was that Cherry had come and it was the thought that counts.

Everyone had a tacit mutual understanding as they glanced at each other with a smile. Their years of sentiments were understood without uttering a single word.

Such an atmosphere was nice.

Lin Jie rubbed his face and cleared his throat, curbing his brilliant smile slightly as he reached out to shift the suitcase to the side. "How can I accept this?"

When shifting the suitcase, he felt the weight of it really heavy, to the point that it was excessive.

It took a great effort for him to stop the sides of his lips from twitching.

Cherry had just sat down on the high stool at the counter. She wasn't seated stably yet, but when she heard what Lin Jie said, she immediately looked towards him eagerly. "This is a gift that I spent three years meticulously preparing, please do accept it."

"This..." Lin Jie was troubled for half a second before finally succumbing to Cherry's gaze. He gave up the back-and-forth haggling and sighed helplessly. "Alright."

He couldn't help but lament at what a sincere child she was. It wouldn't be her past three years of savings inside, would it...

Lin Jie strangely felt like a parent who was collecting the New Year's money his child received and it aroused a slight sense of guilt in him.

Cherry's face immediately brightened up. "You changed my fate all these years ago. If it wasn't for you, the me of today wouldn't be here. Regardless of what I do, no matter how expensive a gift, all these wouldn't be enough to express my gratitude towards you. I can only do my best to put my mind at ease.

"Don't worry. Although the gift may be expensive, it wasn't much trouble for me. As long as you're happy, everything that I did will be worth it."

Cherry took a sneaky glance at Lin Jie's expression as she said this.

After confirming that there was happiness and eagerness, even though restrained in Lin Jie's expression, Cherry let out a silent sigh of relief.

That's great! The gift this time round is to Mr. Lin's liking. He really likes it!

Cherry puffed out her chest, feeling a little proud knowing that she was the person who absolutely understood Mr. Lin the best.

As for the look that Lin Jie had as though he knew what the suitcase contained, Cherry felt that it was justified.

It was Mr. Lin after all. This sealing sigil from the Destructive-rank

white magician was bound to be useless in the face of Mr. Lin. It would really have been strange if that wasn't the case.

Bella looked on from the side with some frustration and let out a silent sigh.

Mistress, oh mistress, you just vowed to let Mr. Lin feel your blazing emotions, but in the blink of an eye you have already forgotten about it and instead became all modest... This won't do. If you don't make it clear, no one would know...

But midway through her thoughts, the maid shook her head as she saw Cherry being immersed in bliss. *Sigh, never mind. There's no helping her.*

Lin Jie smiled. "I'm really happy, but... only just this once. I won't be accepting any more gifts from you in the future, unless there's something you require help with. Then, we can count it as an equivalent exchange."

Cherry was too reliant and trusting of him as well as thought too highly of him. This wasn't a good thing and... It would be appropriate to put some distance between them.

It was alright to be friends, but it would all be over if this little lady were to worship him like some sort of god.

As for now, well... He could still tell that Cherry's expression wasn't forced. Upon consideration of her position in the Ash Chamber of Commerce, Lin Jie reckoned that most things wouldn't be 'much trouble' to her.

Moreover, there wasn't anything unusual in the demeanor of the calm and reliable head maid Bella either.

So this time, he would have to reluctantly accept the gift.

Cherry obediently replied with an OK, but happiness was filling her heart by the minute.

On the surface, Mr. Lin's words seemed like a polite decline for formal reasons.

But in fact, he was also saying that Cherry could look for him if she had had any troubles in the future. This promise was an extremely special honor.

After all, would anyone not know that Boss Lin was practically omnipotent?

Looks like Mr. Lin is really happy this time round.

Cherry took the opportunity to strike while the iron was hot. “Open and see what it is! I spent a long time preparing it. If you’re not satisfied, I can try to look for other rare treasures...”

She recalled what Lin Jie had just mentioned and quickly added, “I’m here because I still have a book that I’d like to consult you about. I hope that you’ll help me to decipher it, so I ought to send another gift.”

Lin Jie couldn’t help feeling like something was amiss.

In a normal course of events, it should be him helping her out first before Cherry chose to give him a gift as thanks. Why had it now become as if Cherry was giving a gift as repayment in order to request something of him?

The difference between the two situations was that the former could receive the favor for free, while the latter needed to pay.

Lin Jie always felt that Cherry, who had the attributes of an overpowering boss, seemed to be somewhat fond of giving him gifts as if this could increase his affection towards her...

Sigh, alright... Lin Jie conceded that this could indeed raise his favorable view of her.

“I appreciate the thought, but you don’t have to give me gifts so frequently. I would much prefer books or things related to culture.”

As Lin Jie spoke, he cast a glance at that black leather suitcase.

Bella immediately respectfully said, “Let me.”

Lin Jie nodded. Bella reached out, and with some deft and complicated maneuvers, opened the clasp of the suitcase.

How excessive... Lin Jie couldn't help but think to himself.

But whatever was inside the suitcase was probably valuable, so requiring such a complicated lock wasn't out of the ordinary.

Lin Jie watched with anticipation as the head maid opened the suitcase.

Clack!

It sounded just like how he imagined it.

However, after seeing the contents of the suitcase, Lin Jie blinked several times, falling into deep thought.

The situation was slightly different from how he imagined it to be.

The suitcase indeed contained a stack, but it wasn't stacks of banknotes, but a stone with stacked layers... That's right, what the suitcase contained was a complete fossil!

The entire piece of pale rock presented fine ridges with lines that looked like scales and blood vessels expanding from the center, spreading out over the layers. At its center point, it appeared as if a heart was embedded on this complete fossil.

Lin Jie was stunned.

A complete fossil with intact soft tissue and organs?!

Cherry explained, "This is an Ancient Dragon heart from the First Era."

According to Azir history, the First Era was at least a hundred million years ago, which also meant that this piece of fossil in front of him was at least that old. Moreover it was an extremely rare fossil that even had intact soft tissue and organs.

Holy, shouldn't this thing be kept in a museum?

The corners of Lin Jie's mouth twitched.

In a sense, this gift before him was far greater than a suitcase full of banknotes in terms of both value and shock factor.

Chapter 169: Boss Lins Identity

Chapter 169: Boss Lin's Identity

No, this wasn't something that could be publicly displayed. The value of this little thing wasn't something that could be measured in money.

No one can put a value on it, neither could it be sold. Therefore, there was no such thing as a market price for such an object.

It's no wonder even Cherry said she had to use a whole three years to prepare this gift...

Even Rolle Resource Development would have a hard time getting their hands on this heart, let alone the Ash Chamber of Commerce. This was something that required both money and power.

Lin Jie glanced at the pale fossil before him, not knowing whether to laugh or cry. No wonder the suitcase was so heavy. It was filled with a rock!

The piece of fossil was about half a square meter and must have already undergone careful preparation. The heart in its central position was well-defined and every blood vessel within was visible and extended out in all directions.

From his initial viewpoint, Lin Jie reckoned the heart was bigger than his own head.

Haa, there are also dinosaur fossils in this other world... thought Lin Jie to himself.

Due to Norzin's unique stratified Upper and Lower Districts where the Upper District was above ground and thoroughly separated from the Lower District, the subterranean resources were entirely monopolized by Rolle Resource Development.

Whatever was discovered below ground would naturally only be

known by Rolle Resource Development personnel.

Also, the theory regarding the origins of life in this world was very backward. Lin Jie hadn't heard of any prehistoric stuff like dinosaurs, and even fossils were few and rare.

The fossil before his eyes could very well be many times more valuable than what he imagined.

But disregarding its value, the pallid heart fossil, after being treated, looked exceptionally so lifelike that it could be considered a work of art on its own.

It was also so delicate that it gave off the illusion that it could peel off its shell and start dancing.

This heart was probably taken from a whole intact fossil. Its workmanship wasn't simple either and this showed that Cherry put a lot of thought into it.

Cherry turned towards Lin Jie with a look of eager anticipation. "Is this gift satisfactory?"

In the history known by transcendent beings, if it was said that the Third Era was the time of Humans, the Second Era was the age of Elves, and the First Era was when Giants ruled, then the Primordial Age was the time of Ancient Dragons.

During the First Era where the Giant Kingdom was afoot, Ancient Dragons still existed, just that they were already exceedingly rare.

By the time of the Second Era without fire, Ancient Dragons had thoroughly disappeared without a trace, leaving behind only their skeletons that were rare and precious casting materials.

The more ancient a dragon skeleton was, the more power it contained.

That Primordial Age was so far away that even if Ancient Dragons from that time left behind any remains, the level of technological means at present had no way of reaching the soil they were at. Thus, Cherry chose an Ancient Dragon fossil of the First Era.

On top of that, it was a ‘heart’ she had given and the implicit meaning behind it needed no explanations.

It's impossible for me to say otherwise, isn't it?

Giving a fossil as a gift as akin to using an atomic bomb for fireworks. Ahh... Just so excessive.

Lin Jie jested inwardly, but naturally, he maintained a smile on the surface and nodded. “This is truly a priceless treasure. While it might just be a stone to others, in my opinion, it actually symbolizes the changes of geography and history. It is precious indeed.”

Cherry's eyes widened. Are there people who would actually view an Ancient Dragon heart as just a stone?!

Even Supreme-rank mages would desire a whole Ancient Dragon if it were presented in front of them. Who in the world would view it as a stone?

It would seem arrogant and ill-informed if it were others who said such a thing.

But since it's people that Mr. Lin knows personally, then they would surely be entities with sufficient ability and power to say so.

Then, after hearing the latter part of his sentence, she realized that the power the heart possessed was insignificant in the eyes of Mr. Lin. “Symbolizing the changes in geography and history” was what gave it value.

Cherry had an epiphany.

Yes, in the face of Mr. Lin's strength, all these sorcery tools are mere toys to him.

And perhaps, Mr. Lin has seen a living Ancient Dragon before, so he doesn't care about a dead one.

So, the only value it had might be to remind him of the past... This Ancient Dragon heart as a witness of history seemed like an apt

description.

“But,” Lin Jie tried his best to put on an expression of delight, “most importantly, it is because it was given to me by Cherry. This is what makes it different.”

Even though he hoped that Cherry could change this priceless treasure into something of monetary value, he knew that the young lady had spent a long time getting people to procure and fix it up. And now, who knows how much manpower had been put into producing such a heart fossil.

Such kind intentions were the true priceless treasure.

Naturally, he couldn't just brush off Cherry's efforts... Even the thought of the staggering amount of money all the painstaking efforts could be exchanged for made him feel it was difficult to breathe.

That's all money!! If he had all that money, he wouldn't be running a bookstore here and would be living his days out in comfort, just reading.

Boss Lin felt an emptiness in his heart.

Cherry's delicate face flushed and she whispered, “I'm glad you like it.”

Bella had no idea what to do with her mistress. Just coming into contact with Mr. Lin had made young Cherry lose all her logic and composure.

Sigh...

Bella sighed. *Mistress doesn't notice the subtle decline in Mr. Lin's tone.*

The kind of lonely sentiment when gazing at the Ancient Dragon heart, as if harboring some sort of melancholic heartache.

Even though Lin Jie covered his emotions well and that brief sense of loss was fleeting like a dragonfly skimming over the water's surface, Bella with her many years of experience as a maid could

read delicate sentiments with precision.

She could basically conclude that not only had Mr. Lin seen those massive Ancient Dragons, but he must have also had a deep connection with those Ancient Dragons.

Those fleeting emotions made it clear that he was certainly missing the nostalgia of life in the past and resignation that he could no longer go back to the old days!

All this time, they had a lot of crazy and wild guesses regarding Mr. Lin.

Amongst them, the one that intrigued them the most was Mr. Lin's prowess as well as his identity.

His prowess was already roughly approximated to be at least Supreme-rank from past experiences, but Mr. Lin's identity had always been a complete mystery since the beginning.

He seemed to have appeared out of thin air, with no vestiges of a past. Even his current identification and registered store information were all falsified by Cherry as a means of repaying his past help.

Now at last, the tip of the iceberg was starting to show.

Bella struggled to keep her pounding heart in check. *If Mr. Lin is a monster that had survived from the First Era, then there might be traces of his identity...*

Chapter 170: Hes A Dragon

Chapter 170: He's A Dragon

Bella's heart raced.

She felt as if she had finally glimpsed a glimmer of truth behind the shadowy image of the mysterious bookstore owner.

Firstly, if dated back to the First Era, then Mr. Lin certainly couldn't be human. That was because humans didn't really exist extensively during that period, or perhaps didn't exist at all.

Secondly, he couldn't be an elf, for the Elves only rose from the ashes of the Giants. It was only after the decline and fall of the Giants due to their large-scale wars did the Elves gain power and establish the Elf Kingdom, gradually replacing the Giants.

And in that fragmented history, the most notable and absolute powers documented were the Four Primordial Witches. However, these few only ever took on the appearance of women, so this possibility could basically be ruled out.

There were also several reputable dragons amongst Ancient Dragons, for example, Calamity Dragon Bakak, the symbol of devastation, Origin Dragon Felix, symbol of wisdom, and Sky Dragon Sliferin, symbol of aether.

However, the Sky Dragon could be eliminated from the possibilities.

Because this fossilized heart which they had brought was from the Sky Dragon which proved that Sliferin had died in the First Era.

As a dragon born out of aether, every part of its body was precious and powerful casting material. The heart, which was its core that transformed aether, was needless to say, the most valuable.

Without doing much, just igniting a tiny bit of aether contained within was more than sufficient to blow up a Destructive-rank.

However, most people wouldn't know how to make use of such a precious object. In the right hands, if this heart was used to create the core of a large-scale array or as a god-tier material in a scepter, it could absolutely amplify the prowess of the wielder.

Besides these, there were also some extremely ancient elemental beings from the First Era, for example, The Light Elemental Scholar, Alfred...

Bella listed down all the great beings of the First Era she had been aware of, but felt that her own knowledge wasn't comprehensive enough.

The head maid watched her mistress and silently decided to properly look up information about the First Era.

It didn't matter if she knew Boss Lin's true identity. What matters is that if Lin Jie was one of those immortal beings, he simply wouldn't be able to accept Cherry. This wasn't just an issue of race, but a fundamental difference between them.

Just like how a human cannot love an ant. This was an unrequited love doomed to fail.

It's my responsibility as an able assistant to make Mistress understand this and to minimize adverse consequences as best as possible, thought Bella to herself.

According to the current indicators, there's a slightly high possibility that Boss Lin was an Ancient Dragon. Judging from his personality and behavior, he's unlikely to be the Calamity Dragon Bakak.

Opening a bookstore, guiding people, a wealth of knowledge, omniscient and omnipotent... The Origin Dragon symbolizing wisdom was said to possess all knowledge in the world. All characteristics the bookstore owner seemed to have.

However, from what Bella knew, the Origin Dragon was only Destructive-rank whereas whether Mr. Lin could demonstrate powers surpassing Supreme-rank remains to be seen.

After exchanging a few pleasantries with Cherry, he suddenly became aware of strange glances coming from the head maid Bella.

The look in her eyes, with a hint of scrutiny, appeared like she was watching something suspicious.

And when she looked towards Cherry, her lips were pursed, as if she were uncomfortable.

Lin Jie was all too familiar with it. Wasn't this the sort of typical 8 p.m. soap opera plot where a 'young rich heiress takes a fancy to the poor fellow running a bookstore while the personal maid attempts to beat him away with a broom'?

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow. Although it probably wasn't that exaggerated, Cherry spending a great deal to gift a fossil was bound to cause some displeasure.

It would be understandable if Bella decided to stop Cherry from interacting with him for her mistress' best interests.

*I wonder whether she'll take out a thick wad of cash in this story-line...
Ahem.*

He would never look forward to such a scene. *My friendship with Cherry is priceless and can't be bought out with money!*

Hmm, the Church of the Dome has been employing brutal means against heresy for so many years suggests that there's a great deal of money to be made... Murder and arson, these come hand in hand. The Church of the Dome wouldn't just do all of it for no benefit.

And even if they didn't do so, the faithful of the Church of the Dome contribute as lot as a tithe annually... They are building chapels everywhere and the Pope, Saintess, and apostles are well-clothed and well-fed. All of this is money.

If the Church of the Dome is successfully taken down and replaced with Vincent, I'm sure all this money would be first spent on charitable facilities and helping the poor given the Father's character. But there's no end to these things.

As for the remaining money...

Perhaps donate it to the Ash Chamber of Commerce.

I believe Cherry will use it correctly, and it can be considered returning her politeness.

Lin Jie sat a little straighter as he thought about this. His eyes coincidentally met Bella's, and he flashed a slight knowing smile.

Bella was startled at seeing the twinkle in his eye. *Has Mr. Lin perceived what I was thinking?*

Is his smile an acknowledgment... He's a dragon!

Lin Jie shifted his gaze and moved the suitcase with the fossil aside. Smiling at Cherry, he asked, "Didn't you say that you need my help regarding a book?"

The blush on Cherry's face faded as she regained her composure and nodded. "This book was hidden away in Congreve's secret room and it was well protected."

She turned around and motioned to Bella, who then took out a book from under her skirt.

Under the skirt?

Question marks popped up in Lin Jie's mind. There were many pockets on the maid's dress, and it was just a book.

How strange.

He took the book and his eyes narrowed slightly. There wasn't any text on the book's cover. The light brown cover felt strange, like leather, yet more delicate and softer, with some shallow lines.

Brushing against it, Lin Jie thought it felt like skin.

No, perhaps I'm wrong...

Lin Jie stared at the book in his hand and a thought came to his

mind.

A human skin book.

This was a book bound entirely by human skin.

Lin Jie's guess wasn't groundless, for he had come across such things before.

In the past, when he was in the midst of a folklore study, he had once come across a remote village with this very strange custom where they took a piece of skin from the back of a deceased person and made it into a human skin drum.

Whenever that village held a sacrificial ceremony, every household would take out their family's human skin drum and beat it, symbolizing the beckoning of spirits to accept the village's sacrifice.

This example was mentioned in the book *Ceremonies And Customs* which he had given to Old Wil.

At that time, out of curiosity and research purpose, he asked to be allowed to observe the village's process of creating the human skin drum and the villagers had unexpectedly agreed with enthusiasm.

Those drums felt exactly the same as the cover of the book he was holding...

Chapter 171: Human Skin Book

Chapter 171: Human Skin Book

Lin Jie had yet to see the book's contents, but his entire face had already paled.

The village with the custom of making human skin drums had done so out of yearning and respect for the dead. The skin they used were from the backs of the recently deceased and the drums were used to beckon to these souls through a special ceremony.

They believed that the soul leaves a body from behind and thus the skin on a person's back had spiritual properties and could act as a gateway to the netherworld for a person's soul.

And all these human skin were prepared by the old priests of the village using ceremonial knives, and it was a sacred and masterful process.

So, while this custom might sound weird, it was in fact a sort of primitive manifestation of the culture of death which wouldn't be viewed too badly by others...

Of course, this was only Lin Jie's personal opinion. He had researched folklore and customs for so many years and had experienced many bizarre customs so he wasn't too fazed.

However, just thinking of an object like this might be a tad creepy for the average person.

On the other hand, this book was different. It came from Congreve.

This was a man who made a secret deal with the Church of the Dome to create 'Holy Moon Essence' for profit and there definitely was no cultural aspect to this.

Therefore, whether this skin came from a living or dead person remained unclear.

From Cherry's depiction of Congreve, Lin Jie reckoned that there was a slight propensity for it to be the latter.

The thought that this piece of skin could have come from an innocent person made the book feel even heavier in Lin Jie's hands.

The Church the Dome that used unknown addictive compounds to control the congregation and killed wantonly using a so-called god as a guise, and Congreve, who bound books with human skins, were both committing grievous crimes that were beyond normal comprehension.

An evil organization with a sinister purpose, and a twisted murderer... thought Lin Jie to himself as he flipped open that human skin book.

Bella's follow-up of a detailed explanation confirmed Lin Jie's thoughts. "We can't understand the words in this book, but after thoroughly studying it, we've found that this book is made entirely from human skin.

"The cover is made from the back skin of a man in his prime, two pieces joined together. The 'paper' of every page, in order to maintain the thin and soft texture, makes use of baby..."

At this point, Bella realized that the young man at the counter was completely un-moving and the entire store was so silent one could hear a pin drop.

Bella's heart thumped as she watched Lin Jie looking at the opened book without saying a single word.

But, not knowing whether she was perceiving things wrongly, Bella saw the dark eyes of the bookstore owner, seemingly filled with thunderous intent, like dark ominous clouds brewing up a massive storm.

"Mr. Lin?"

Lin Jie nodded, then smiled slightly. "Go on."

A chill ran down Bella's spine as she saw Lin Jie's usual smile. A thought popped up in her head. *Mr. Lin is angry.*

But Lin Jie had asked her to continue. Bella regarded this as a warning and didn't contemplate further, clearing her throat and finishing the explanation.

But for some reason, she lowered her voice subconsciously.

Lin Jie's gaze returned to the page.

Of course he was mad.

This human skin book was a twisted amalgamation of numerous crimes, and the extent of the cruelty was appalling.

“Huu...”

Lin Jie took a deep breath, regaining his composure as he settled down to view the book's contents.

“Huh?”

As soon as he saw the first word, Lin Jie recognized that these were the same sort of characters that were inscribed on the sacred sword he kept upstairs.

At the same time, it was also the common language used by elves.

This was a language of the Second Era that had already been lost in the long river of time during the dark ages. It was no wonder Cherry couldn't find anyone capable of translating this book even with the vast financial muscle at her disposal.

Of course, that could also have been because she couldn't let too many people know about this book. Perhaps, if she were to widen her scope, Cherry might be able to find a suitable linguist.

For example, Old Wil.

However, he was currently undercover at 'Blood Feast' and probably won't have the time.

It was also fortunate that Lin Jie had received Candela's memory in the dream. Although a large part was still missing, at least language

had been packaged along with it.

Lin Jie looked through it carefully and discovered that the contents of the book were very different from what he had imagined.

It wasn't the sort of dark magic that one would associate with such a human skin book.

The words written in blood red were more like a person's soliloquy. Questions without answers, answers without questions, monologues, and at times, simple commands.

Putting it simply, it was like a conversation with another person that didn't exist.

The tone was condescending, but the wordings were enticing.

It felt like the diary of a twisted psychopath's daily mental struggles.

"Is Congreve crazy?"

After Lin Jie read out the contents he had seen, Cherry and Bella immediately exchanged glances, finding it difficult to understand what Congreve was playing at.

Moreover, this wasn't the 'incriminating evidence against Congreve' that they were expecting, and it was somewhat disappointing.

Cherry said, "But at the very least, we can know that he intercepted a shipment which he gave to the Church of the Dome."

There were clear cut references to the Church of the Dome inside the book. The meeting place was also recorded, so as long as there were still transactions, the two ladies would be able to follow the tracks and thoroughly expose their evils.

No. Lin Jie's eyes narrowed. *This isn't written by Congreve.*

He flipped through the book from start to finish once more and eventually sorted out his thoughts.

The tone of words employed in the writing here was mostly commanding and beguiling. On top of that, things like ‘the ‘Ash Chamber of Commerce is nothing’, ‘assist you in usurping and getting rid of Cherry’, ‘for the great cause’ and other such phrases.

It clearly wouldn’t make sense if Congreve was insane. The long arguments here were too objective and logical.

Lin Jie immediately wondered whether this was a form of transmitted messages?

Or perhaps this human skin book was something like a ‘magic mirror’ where Congreve spoke to it and the words automatically wrote themselves on the human skin book? Everything would certainly make sense if this was the case.

However, he still wasn’t sure and translating so much content in such a short span of time was difficult and there were still areas he didn’t understand too well.

However, this somewhat scary conjecture was yet unproven, so Lin Jie decided to not mention it so as to not frighten the two ladies.

“Please leave this human skin book with me. There are still some areas I’m yet unable to translate fully. You can first investigate where they met and see if you can find any clues.”

Lin Jie also told them about Claude who was next door and urged them to seek his help.

As he watched Cherry and Bella leave reluctantly, Lin Jie placed the human skin book aside temporarily and once again returned his attention onto the suitcase that held the fossilized heart.

He didn’t notice an oozing line of blood-colored words appearing in the last page of the human skin book—

“I’ve

Found

You.”

Chapter 172: Bellas Recollection

Chapter 172: Bella's Recollection

172: Bella's Recollection

Cherry was still in a bit of a daze after walking out of the bookstore with Bella.

Their first meeting after three years had ended just like that.

Although a bit brief and rushed, she was still very satisfied. This incident had allowed her to get back in touch with Boss Lin, and if things continued to worsen, she would be able to work more closely with the bookstore.

It wasn't just about working with Lin Jie or the usual giving of a gift, but rather about forming relations with those other extraordinary people who had connections with the bookstore.

Only this way would she be able to maintain her relationship with Boss Lin, because the shared interest amongst them would hold them together.

There were no friends nor enemies that last forever, only eternal interests.

That's what these three years had taught her.

Although Cherry had still had her feelings towards Lin Jie, she also believed that Boss Lin was not the type of person to casually cast his customers aside. However, she was well aware that she was merely a customer in the eyes of Lin Jie.

A replaceable customer.

If she was just a customer, she could also gain more than enough benefits from Boss Lin. However, Cherry was ambitious. She wanted

even more, at least to the extent that Boss Lin would one day remember that he once had a customer named Cherry.

Bella couldn't help but lower her head and whisper, "Mistress, Mr. Lin could very possibly be..."

Cherry returned to her senses and replied dejectedly, "I know, you wish to say that he could possibly be a long-lived being, and of a different world from me, and that my delusion can never become reality."

Bella didn't expect for her seemingly besotted mistress to actually be really sensible at this time, and she suddenly felt bad. "Mistress..."

Cherry did not seem to mind at all as she looked up and flashed a bright smile at Bella. "Mr. Lin is a lot gentler now than he was before."

Bella nodded in agreement at that point, but shook her head afterwards.

"Mr. Lin indeed looks like he's more easygoing and sincere than he was three years ago. He doesn't have that suffocatingly oppressive and detached vibe he had back then, but he seems to have gotten even scarier than before."

Till this day, Bella still remembered her first time meeting Mr. Lin. It was also at this rundown and dimly lit bookstore back then. At that time, her youthful mistress was engrossed in a book, while the bookstore owner slowly talked about how words could be properly used to achieve goals without blood-shed.

Even after all these years, she could not forget the young man's curious gaze that seemed to isolate entire worlds with indifference.

As well as the shadow behind him that cracked a smile...

Cherry tilted her head. "Scarier?"

Her lips quirked into a smile. "No way, he's always been a very gentle and good person."

Mistress' affection was clearly clouding her judgment.

"Mr. Lin got angry just now..."

Bella could only talk about what she had sensed in the bookstore just now and said frankly, "I hope that no one incurs Mr. Lin's wrath at this point of time."

Cherry put her hands behind her back and replied nonchalantly, "Under current circumstances, those who would incur Mr. Lin's wrath can only be scheming fools who aren't up to any good."

"Congreve especially, he's simply trying to ruin the entire Ash Chamber of Commerce. Besides covertly intercepting goods, he also leads clients to make illegal exchanges. I really don't know how many foolish things he has done."

Bella whispered, "I'll immediately send someone to the meeting point to investigate. And since we have someone from the Secret Rite Tower cooperating with us, as long as we can find witnesses and evidence, we can make Congreve suffer for his actions."

Right that moment, the two suddenly stopped in their tracks and gazed into the distance.

At the end of that street, came a young blond, blue-eyed young man. He was handsome with flawless features and had an infectious smile that would disarm most.

However, this smile was far too perfect. Each bit was too measured, and that expression seemed perfectly maintained all the time. Like a perfect statue, strangely out of place.

Despite this, the two ladies couldn't feel any hostility from the young man. On the contrary, he did not look away, only glancing at them slightly before continuing to walk forward.

Cherry and Bella remained alert as the young man passed by them.

He headed towards the bookstore, could he be a customer?

This was the first thought that came to Cherry.

Afterwards, as she glanced back, she noticed a red slender cross on his back that was as red as the color of fresh blood.

Lin Jie's gaze fell on that pale stone heart.

He stood up and pulled the suitcase over. He suddenly felt troubled observing the white fossil that took up the entire suitcase.

Where was he going to keep such a large thing?

The counter could fit smaller objects like the stone gargoyle and rose, but a stone at least half a meter wide would severely block his line of sight.

How would he operate his shop properly then?

Furthermore, the overall furnishings of his bookstore was also discordant. If his store was slightly bigger, he could change the layout again, making a whole display wall just like those antique shops and place the fossil in a glass case there.

The only problem was that this rundown bookstore was lacking in anti-theft measures if such an eye-catching object were coveted.

Previously, Hood and his bunch had broken in, so an incident with a fossil thief didn't seem too far-fetched.

Thinking about it, he could only keep it as a private collection, and showing it off to a few regular customers also seemed a bit foolish...

A private collection it is. In any case, now that I own a fossil, it can be considered quite an achievement. I hope Norzin doesn't have a rule for me to hand it over to the Central District.

Lin Jie then tried to take that fossil out of the suitcase, but when his hands touched the fossilized heart, an accident happened.

The white heart cracked!

Wait!

What?

I just barely touched it!

However, the piece of stone clearly couldn't hear Lin Jie's inner shouts of flabbergast.

With the sound of a crack, the outer shell of the stone split open, revealing a faint white glow from its center that contracted and expanded continuously with what sounded like a faint heartbeat.

Ba-dump!

Ba-dump!

The outer layers on the surface of the pale stone's shell peeled off one after the other, revealing a beating heart that was as transparent as glass.

???

Wait a moment. This... it revived?!

Lin Jie blinked several times as a sense of great intrigue overcame him.

All that he had seen in Candela's memories were from the Second Era. Although he knew otherworldly beings such as elves had existed before, he didn't know there were still others.

Since this Ancient Dragon Heart came from a complete dragon skeleton, it meant that there was something wrong with the skeleton.

Could it be that the dinosaurs of this world are really dragons?

Chapter 173: Dragons Descendant

Chapter 173: Dragon's Descendant

A question crossed Lin Jie's mind. *Are the dragons of Azir dinosaurs or actual dragons from legends?*

It had been three years since Lin Jie transmigrated here and he felt he had a good grasp of the general situation of this world.

At least, integrating into this world wasn't a problem for him and he knew what most people of this world knew.

This wasn't because he had a good memory, but because Azir's history was just too short and uncomplicated.

Information about this world from official sources included the Primordial Age, First, Second and Third Eras, spanned over a hundred million years and it was comparable to Earth's own history.

Generally speaking, this amount of information ought to be enough to write a few thick volumes of Azir's History.

The spread of the 'Great Pestilence' in the Second Era that ruined a certain ancient nation and the birth of the 'Wall of Fog', which caused all civilizations to collapse after multiple disasters meant that all history before this period was fuzzy.

In the end, only a small portion of history remained, that was from when the huge city nation of Humans, Norzin was built over the ruins in the Third Era.

This portion covering the complete industrialization was thin and the only thing worth studying was a period of resistance during the process of separating Norzin into the Upper and Lower City Districts.

Of course, this resistance was from those who became mutated from being afflicted by the great Wall of Fog, a time of chaos and bloodiness. This dark history was also destined to never be studied openly by the majority of people.

Therefore, in this world, history, like art, was like an elective for students of this world, with only one lesson a week, and no need for examination...

It was only when he started reading ***Dark Ages: Rise & Fall of Alfords*** did Lin Jie finally discover the truth of the Second Era's history.

There really were elves in this world, as well as some extraordinary powers!

Although Lin Jie had heard rumors about some supernatural powers, he remained skeptical, for he had never witnessed them personally.

But now, he believed it.

The unknown nation destroyed in the Second Era was actually the kingdom of Elves. So, it could be possible that an ancient dinosaur fossil from the First Era could really be a dragon from legends!

As for whether this history was deliberately concealed, or because of some other factors—for example, the people who read this book had all gone mad, according to Hood—no one knew for sure.

These doubts that Lin Jie had didn't linger. His attention was soon drawn by the translucent heart in front of his eyes that had completely "broken out of its shell".

The outer pale stone shell layer had completely vaporized.

The entire heart was beating nonstop on the groove of its base. The core of it was like an obscure mass of energy that expanded and contracted as it beat whilst emitting a continuous white glow.

Tiny blood vessels gradually lit up, just like a new shoot sprouting out of an old withered tree and filled with vitality.

The originally pale and rigid heart fossil had come 'alive' and it seemed like it was getting larger.

Lin Jie's hand was still on the heart, and all of a sudden he sensed a distinct change. Originally cold and stiff, this heart fossil had become warm and soft, and was constantly wiggling.

Lin Jie's hair stood on end.

"Huff... Calm down, calm down..."

Lin Jie took deep breaths as he felt the rapidly hastening heart beats. He first had to get away from this glistening heart that was flickering like a time bomb about to explode.

But when he tried moving a little, he realized that there seemed to be an invisible force grabbing onto his hand and not letting him go.

"?"

Then, a bright light shone from its core as thin bands of energy emerged, winding up his arm like little long snakes before coiling together as it started to 'inch' towards his heart.

"What the?!"

Cold sweat trickled down Lin Jie's forehead and he shouted decisively, "Blackie!

"Blackie help! I'm in trouble!"

As if ready to grant a request, Blackie appeared, his blurry shadow converging on the windows.

Lin Jie was overjoyed.

However, the black shadow hovered for a bit, as if turning to look at Lin Jie, then vanished.

Vanished.

...

Lin Jie's struggle was in vain. His aid had forsaken him, and for a moment he felt as if he had been abandoned by the entire world.

Lin Jie might be smiling, but he was cursing deep down. Gritting his teeth, he tried his utmost to pull himself free.

Fortunately, Silver's recent dreams reflected reality and his strength was much greater than before.

The invisible force seemed to loosen.

I need to keep this up.

But the converged energy bands seemed to be much faster and he couldn't keep track of them.

In the blink of an eye, it went through his chest.

Lin Jie had a strange feeling that 'something' had been transmitted to his heart, but besides that, it didn't hurt and it actually felt warm and soothing.

Is this... the aether I've sensed in my dreams?

A faint halo of light burst forth from his chest and he vaguely heard the sound of wind from afar.

It's resonating with me. It feels intimate, as though seeing an acquaintance once more after a long time...

Lin Jie's movements became slower as he inexplicably came up with such a thought. He glanced at the rapidly withering heart.

Wait no, why are you resonating with me?

Do you think I'm descended from a dragon?

Wake up. We aren't the same kind...

Lin Jie was stunned. On his own, he didn't seem to have any reason to resonate with it, but his body had indeed undergone a strange change before.

After eating Sliver's gift, that seemingly ordinary fruit, Lin Jie had grown eight extra teeth and became the image of a so-called 'perfect human'.

And he remembered the tree in Sliver's dream. Its thick trunk and forked branches were obviously shaped like a huge dragon spreading its wings.

He had always thought that it was just a strange tree, but the heart fossil before him had inspired him to look at it from another point of view.

What if that tree was transformed from a dragon?

What had he eaten then, and why did it change his body structure... But he wouldn't be able to get the answers to these questions for the time being.

Right now, his best guess was that the fruit was the reason behind his body's transformation, which then resulted in this revived heart assuming they were of the same species and wanting to bestow something onto him.

This also explained why Blackie left after a mere glance. It was because this heart was of some use to Lin Jie.

But still, why didn't he take a closer look?

It was difficult for Lin Jie to think such thoughts now, for he could feel the heart had given him so much that he felt bloated and almost overflowing.

All the extra energy surged through his body like a wave, numbing his skin, his chest, throat, and the left half of his face and eyes, and especially around his chest area.

It was as if the 'heart' had finally found a place to vent its wrath accumulated over millions of years.

Fortunately, this heart seems to finally be dying down.

He watched as the energy bands on his arm fell off in turn, turning

into specks of light that dissipated.

This time, the heart turned completely into a dry stone.

Lin Jie massaged his stiff arm and took a deep breath whilst suppressing his inexplicable desire to hit someone. Just as he was about to put the heart down, he heard the jingle of the bell as the door opened.

Lin Jie turned and saw a young golden-haired youth that had entered as well as noticing his seemingly plastic smile and the conspicuous long red cross in his hand.

Shiing!

The handsome golden-haired youth drew out a long sword from his cross-shaped sheath, like some sort of a heroic dragon slayer.

Chapter 174: Michael

Chapter 174: Michael

Michael didn't give a care to the two feeble lifeforms that he passed by.

Even though these weak fellows seemed wary of him, just like a human doesn't concern himself with the opinions of a bug, he overlooked these harmless creatures.

In his eyes, these lower lifeforms couldn't hide any secret from him.

With his 'Eyes of Insight', whether it was one's inner thoughts, race, identity, abilities, or even past experiences or future trajectory, all of these could be instantly seen.

This was the massive gulf between beings of different levels.

Perhaps when Michael first ascended to such a realm, he might have been excited and even curious about seeing and even manipulating the fates of others.

But as he encountered more and more people and saw tens of thousands of lives, viewing other's fate with disdain became a daily occurrence and he started to lose interest.

He realized that these people were actually not much different from ants.

Their fates were nothing more than ants bustling about in a nest, with only a few possibilities when making choices. And when the basis was enlarged, the degree of coincidence of their fates would also be vastly multiplied.

For a long time, he had thought the world to be so dull.

But one day, he suddenly discovered another kind of possibility in this world. Within dreams was a place of infinite possibilities that no one had ever stepped foot in before.

A long-lost hope was rekindled in Michael's long dead heart.

However, the dream realms were sealed off by the Wall of Fog, and the prowess of the Four Primordial Witches was so immense that Michael could only exclaim in amazement. Only when unstable would small cracks appear which allowed dream beasts to escape.

It was this that led to the creation of Hunter Organizations to hunt down these beasts.

These people feared dreams as much as they feared wild beasts and reckoned the dream realm was the source of evil. However, Michael begged to differ.

Within the treacherous appearance of dreams, lay a hidden path that didn't exist.

A path that was boundless and close to origin.

And to do so, he needed to tear down the barrier of the dream realm, something he couldn't do by himself—Although he prides himself on being a superior being, it was only in the aspect of intelligence, and this was the gulf between realms.

In short, this was how the 'Path of the Flaming Sword' came about.

They were a group of like-minded individuals who came together in pursuit of common goals and ideals.

But of course, the 'Path of the Flaming Sword' wasn't just these few. In the umpteen years since inception, they had expanded all sorts of down-lines.

Included amongst them was the owner of that human skin book, 'Blood Curse Mage', Zuikaku.

Originally, Zuikaku was supposed to be a liaison with Congreve to control the most capable young people in the Ash Chamber of Commerce.

Although Cherry popped up out of nowhere and investigations showed that she had links with Lin Jie, it didn't really affect their

plans.

Congreve was just a supplementary aid. The core of their true plan was the Church of the Dome.

But before they knew it, a traitor had unknowingly emerged within the Church of the Dome and caused great chaos.

And on investigations, that bookstore owner by the name of Lin Jie was involved.

If not for their plans being disrupted twice... no, thrice, and intel had reported that this bookstore owner was 'omniscient', Michael wouldn't have acted in person.

To Michael, plans being ruined wasn't too important. It was this fellow's so-called 'omniscience' that made him feel like laughing.

Even Michael himself didn't dare call himself 'omniscient', yet this Supreme-rank being who had mysteriously popped up dared to brazenly claim so.

—While this description was given by others, most of the time, it was with the acquiescence of the person involved.

Let me see what gives you the right to be called 'omniscient'. If it doesn't amuse me, then I'll have your fate end here.

Michael smiled slightly as he pushed open the door to the bookstore and drew his sword from the cross sheath.

As a matter of fact, he had already felt somewhat disappointed ever since he started observing in secret.

Cherry and Bella bringing the human skin book here was at the 'Path of the Flaming Sword's' behest.

Firstly, despite trying, they simply had no way of locating this bookstore via other ordinary or magical means, as if the bookstore was shrouded by a fog. This was also one of the reasons it intrigued them.

So, they had gotten Zuikaku to gain control of the mole by Congreve's side and gotten this human skin book which had the ability of being traced over to Cherry.

The two ladies would simply treat this book full of ancient writing as some important evidence they couldn't understand and thus, hand it over to the person pulling strings from behind the curtains, which would be Lin Jie.

This was all part of the plan.

At the same time, informants from within the Truth Union that had been monitoring the majority of Church of the Dome followers via the aetheric surveillance system had passed on intel that some of these followers were gathering beside the bookstore.

The heretic Vincent might have likely gotten instructions from Lin Jie to start a new faith and overthrow the Church of the Dome.

While they had warned Rodney not to view the church with too much importance, they still couldn't let the chaos continue on.

What disappointed Michael was that Lin Jie hadn't even noticed that the human skin book had the ability to be traced, nor even foresaw his arrival.

Otherwise, he definitely wouldn't let Cherry and Bella walk out just like that.

Seems like your omniscience is nothing more than a joke.

So, today, I shall teach you a lesson, and let you understand what it means to be powerless.

And while Michael's expression lit up, Zuikaku would lead his magician corps and thoroughly destroy the book cafe next door as well as everyone in it.

I hope this fellow's expression of pain will bring me some joy.

As Michael thought to himself, he noticed the figure standing behind the counter turn over. In the dimly lit bookstore, a single

golden pupil full of violence and rage glowed brightly.

Only half of that man's face in the darkness was illuminated by the light. Dark scales glistened, alongside a sinister smile and fine white teeth, making him seem like a monster that devoured humans.

Heavy and thunderous heartbeats caused the aether all around to undulate, but seemingly contained by the unremarkable bookstore.

Michael's expression froze, as he suddenly experienced a familiar shudder he hadn't experienced in a long time. The terror of being cowered by great wings that blocked out the sky.

—A dragon's might!

The eye opened and closed, as its gaze fell onto Michael's sword.

Lin Jie's face suddenly darkened.

This person seems to have ill intentions, is he trying to murder me?!

Chapter 175: He Knows Everything!

Chapter 175: He Knows Everything!

When this strange golden-haired youth strode into the store and pulled out a sword without saying a thing, Lin Jie's mind went to work.

First of all, he was absolutely certain that the sword in the young man's hand was real.

The shape and size of this sword weren't all too different from the sacred sword hanging upstairs, but the shape of the cross was just too unconventional.

But because Lin Jie didn't know whether the cross held any religious meaning for the faiths of this world, he wasn't able to ascertain whether this fellow was a member of a certain religion or cult.

If he were one, the situation could be even more dangerous because of some prejudice.

Secondly, this fellow entered the bookstore with a weapon, so Lin Jie ruled out the intention of random killing because this person seemed to have a purposeful motive and had come straight to the bookstore.

Under other circumstances, Cherry and Bella who had left the bookstore moments ago would have been his most likely targets, but this hadn't happened.

—At the thought of this, Lin Jie realized that Cherry and Bella practically had a close shave with danger.

On top of that, the book cafe next door had many customers today and it was rather lively. Most of the time, no one would be coming

over here.

There's even police next door!

Then, this meant that the other party had a purpose and it could very likely be with the intention of revenge.

But this came the question: Why would anyone have enmity with a kind and ordinary bookstore owner like Lin Jie?

He had no answer for the time being.

But just because he didn't have enmity with others didn't mean that others would feel the same towards him.

Even though Vincent brought the bookstore benefits, he had brought along more troubles. The slice of the pie he was attempting to gain was of the greatest interest to the Church of the Dome, and the plans he set in motion were to ultimately establish his own faith and displace the Church of the Dome.

So, it didn't seem to be preposterous that the Church of the Dome would send someone to nip this in the bud.

And if they had found out the purpose of all those people that had gathered next door, using Lin Jie to set an example wasn't out of the question.

If that were the case, then the Church of the Dome was an organization that would do anything without the slightest scruples!

They had believers on their side and were unafraid of their misdeeds or evils being made known. As long as they gave a simple explanation, those followers would believe them.

And as long as all those in the know were silenced and no others dared to speak up, their actions—however brutal and merciless it was—would be worth it.

Yet another possibility was that this was from the side of Cherry's foe, which also meant that Congreve had sent someone to retrieve the human skin book.

That book soaked in the blood of innocents was still fresh in Lin Jie's mind, and the anger he felt simply couldn't be suppressed.

There was no need to waste his breath now that someone had come straight in wielding a weapon.

Lin Jie decided to act first and talk later.

Michael was somewhat dazed.

Just a second earlier, he had just stepped into the bookstore with a great feeling of superiority, prepared to give this shameless fellow an unforgettable night.

He was going to expose this bookstore owner's naivety. Only by reaching the apex and not merely achieving Supreme-rank could one claim true omniscience and omnipotence.

The difference between Supreme-ranks could be even greater than the gulf between a Supreme-rank and an ordinary person.

A worthless Supreme-rank like Rodney, and one that had been raised by them was basically just ordinary.

He was a mortal at heart and would forever be a mortal.

Michael would tell this Lin Jie fellow all of this, via actions and personally let him experience...

That was how it ought to have played out.

But why... Why did reality turn out a little differently?

And in that short span of less than a second, Michael first felt a shudder straight from the depths of his soul. As if an Ancient Dragon had come crashing down on his spirit with all its might, holding him down beneath his claws.

He froze, unable to move, and that was when he suddenly remembered that Michael was just his own code-name.

His real name was Alfred, the Great Light Elemental Scholar, High Priest, Seer and Ordained One, who after escaping the shackles of a lifespan, left his own people and became an entity that was known in the legends.

If he hadn't once again experienced a dragon's might today, perhaps he would never have remembered who he was.

Hundreds of millions of years ago, during the time where Ancient Dragons existed, all other creatures couldn't do anything but tremble and shudder in the face of a dragon's might.

Light Elemental beings were the same as well.

Michael felt fear and realized the truth—He hadn't actually overcome this.

His instincts as a Light Elemental being were still deeply engraved within his core.

“No no no, it's impossible!

“Impossible... ah, cough cough cough...”

Michael cried out in panic, then grabbed his throat to stifle his own voice when he realized what had happened. He glanced up to look at the golden pupil, and finally the scene of battle in his mind faded.

A dragon's might represented absolute dominance, especially at such close quarters.

The short span in his trance was more than enough for an ordinary Supreme-rank to have died once.

Michael stared blankly towards his right. The red cross had fallen to the ground and had already warped out of shape, clearly showing how intense that battle had been.

At the same time, he felt acute pangs of pain throughout his body, and he could clearly sense the numerous broken bits within his body.

This body can no longer be used... thought Michael to himself.

As he gradually returned to his senses, scenes of battles he had experienced before slowly came back to his mind. The beauty of destruction, like a storm tearing through a butterfly, which was terrifying.

Calamity Dragon Bakak , Michael mused. Only that entity had such an aura.

But the Lin Jie before him didn't seem to be completely whole.

The bookstore owner who seemed to be in a half-dragon state leaned forward in a rather oppressive posture and narrowed his eyes. "Have you come regarding the Church of the Dome... or rather, because of the human skin book?"

Michael found it difficult to breathe. He suddenly shuddered upon hearing this.

He knows?

He knows!

He already knew about the human skin book's tracing ability. He was intentionally trying to lure me out!

"Heheh... Ha-ha-ha-ha... I never imagined I would see a day where someone completely reads me, hahaha...."

Michael suddenly burst into a low laugh. "I've lost this time. Interesting, really interesting..."

But looking at the time, Zuikaku's magician corps should have already arrived. As long as he bought some time here a little longer, the next-door book cafe would be reduced to dust.

Lin Jie frowned, sensing this guy's refusal to cooperate. *Is he pretending to be a fool?*

Lin Jie gave a cold chuckle. "Do you think doing so is of any use?"

Michael was startled and terrified. *He knows what I'm thinking?*

Seeing this expression, Lin Jie knew right away that this fellow wanted to feign insanity and thus continued, "Let me tell you this. The police are next door and you won't be able to escape from the law. I've seen criminals like you so many times, so did you think I wouldn't know what you are thinking?"

Chapter 176: Not Very Smart

Chapter 176: Not Very Smart

Michael gave no reply.

He frowned and pondered the meaning of the bookstore owner's words. *Police... He definitely isn't referring to the ordinary police. This fellow seems even more like a mastermind pulling the strings from the shadows compared to me. There's no way he's referring to the ordinary police, can he?*

If this fellow has been awaiting me to take the bait from the beginning and has everything all laid out, he's definitely the mastermind from the shadows.

Therefore, the police he refers to are probably the 'police' from Secret Rite Tower that maintain the extraordinary world order and have that inexplicable sense of justice.

Before arriving here, Michael had only roughly learned about the situation here and didn't even bother using aether to investigate. He knew that next door was where the Church of the Dome traitor, Vincent, had gathered believers of the church and probably where he was planning to convert them.

But he hadn't really noticed the involvement of Secret Rite Tower personnel.

In any case, all these people were like ants and he didn't care what happened to them. The only one Michael was concerned about was this bookstore owner.

Who would have expected things to have screwed up on the spot...

Now, this body of his was ruined and things seemed a little complicated.

Now hearing what the bookstore owner said, it seemed as if he was

implying that Secret Rite Tower had set up an ambush here... Although Zuikaku and his magician corps were pretty strong, they still couldn't go up against Secret Rite Tower.

Most importantly, Lin Jie seemed to have a clear understanding of Michael's thoughts, and even seemed well prepared.

"Haa..."

Michael narrowed his eyes. He knew that the man was indeed stronger than him, but still didn't believe that he was omniscient.

He would rather attribute all this to the bookstore owner's wisdom, taking a single step while planning ten steps ahead. This was indeed the sort of game people at their level played.

"Perhaps 'Wisdom' suits you even better than Felix. Seems like you have never shown all sides of yourself to others."

Michael has tacitly assumed that the bookshop owner Lin Jie was Bakak, the Calamity Dragon known as the symbol of 'Devastation' who had disappeared during the First Era.

Although he was the Great Light Elemental Scholar and had survived since the First Era, he still wasn't as old as those Ancient Dragons.

When Michael first started to make a name for himself, Ancient Dragons had already largely disappeared, and there was only an old dragon, Origin Dragon, Felix. Michael had once visited this old dragon once, but heard of its demise shortly after.

Since his opponent was a powerful elder, Michael's attitude naturally changed, and he was willing to give his opponent due respect.

Huh? Lin Jie was confused. What's with his tone? Why is he praising me after being seen through?

Lin Jie had never heard of the name "Felix", but from his tone, Lin Jie could roughly tell that this person had come straight for him from the start.

Not only did he know Lin Jie, but it seemed like he had also learned about Lin Jie from a lot of other people.

And now, he discovered that Lin Jie in person was rather different from the rumors and was in fact someone very intelligent... Lin Jie even suspected that this fellow was actually beating around the bush to say that he wasn't smart, but didn't have the proof.

Or perhaps this fellow failed in his bid to feign insanity and changed his game plan to stall him and wait for reinforcements or find a chance to escape?

Lin Jie could not be fooled by this evil trick, but since the other party seemed to have a desire to pour out his thoughts, Lin Jie would naturally try to extract some information from him.

Deceiving people was something he was most adept at, and there was no way he could lose against such a guy.

At least, that was what Boss Lin thought. He then replied nonchalantly, "What others see isn't the real me, of course. They rely on subjective feelings and what they get is second-hand information that is already processed. And when you hear of this information from others, that is already third-hand information.

"You rushed over to try to kill me without fully understanding me." Lin Jie glanced at the youth with an air of superiority.

"From this, I can infer that you aren't very 'smart'."

While I don't know whether this fellow was actually mocking me, I'm sure it won't go wrong if I took the offensive.

This seemingly haughty youth looked like someone who couldn't handle provocations. And people were more likely to speak without thinking when they were angry.

This bit was most important because the other party had assumed Lin Jie was an ordinary bookstore owner and never expected such a huge battering. By saying this, he would surely misjudge Lin Jie to be harboring some big secret.

“You!” Michael had lived for hundreds of millions of years and had always been superior to all other living beings. This was the first time someone had said he wasn’t ‘very smart’.

Coincidentally, “intelligence” was the trait that Michael was most proud of. He was instantly infuriated as Lin Jie mentioned his pet peeve. A surge of anger rushed over him and he was itching to teach this bookstore owner a lesson.

But as he looked up, he saw the jet black dragon scales on Lin Jie’s face ‘receding’ back under his skin as the bookstore owner returned to human form.

The Great Light Elemental Scholar realized that there might have been a deeper meaning to this remark.

People don’t see him for who he really was.

This could mean that he wasn’t actually the bookstore owner by the name of Lin Jie, but the Calamity Dragon Bakak from ancient times.

But at the same time, when putting together his comments on Felix and seeing this fellow changed from a half-dragon form back to human, could the bookstore owner be implying that the Calamity Dragon Bakak wasn’t the real him either?!

Michael’s eyes narrowed and he felt shock for the first time in a long while. “Who exactly are you?!”

If the Calamity Dragon Bakak isn’t his real identity, then who exactly could he be? What exactly was he hiding from that time where I had yet to exist...

Michael’s heart skipped a beat. Wasn’t the ‘unknown’ what he was seeking after all?

It seems like I’ve succeeded in fooling him, Lin Jie thought to himself.

From that expression, that young man seemed to have made up his own amazing version of me.

I don’t really know what’s going through his mind, but that isn’t the

point. More importantly, I have to get some useful information from him.

Lin Jie smiled wryly. “Before asking others for something, shouldn’t you first show some sincerity?”

Since the other side didn’t seem to show any fear, it probably meant that the young man had something to lean on, perhaps a large criminal organization like Blood Feast.

They had dared send someone straight to his doorstep to kill, so who knew what they might plan next.

There were more than one enemy. Getting rid of this one today would be useless for Lin Jie because there would be many more even if he were to eliminate this one.

Only by a thorough study and eliminating the root cause would he be able to prevent future incidents.

In any case, Claude had always been involved in this matter and it was said that Joseph would come over tonight. Thus, the book cafe’s safety was essentially guaranteed tonight.

Lin Jie would first lead him on and let this young man show some ‘sincerity’. As for what sincerity was, he would first... he would let the other party interpret it for himself.

Michael composed himself. This so-called ‘sincerity’ was simple in his opinion.

Since he wanted to know the bookstore owner’s identity, he could never ask for it just by using an ordinary identity. That would be way too impolite to someone of the same level and it was reasonable for the bookstore owner to make such a request.

Of course, he couldn’t just make his Light Elemental body appear in Norzin right away.

“Alfred Harvey Grantham...

“This is half of my real name. Of course, that is already the past. My

current name is Michael.”

Real names were powerful. Even half of it was enough to command Light Elemental beings below Destructive-rank.

“Is this good enough, for my sincerity?”

Chapter 177: That's It?

Chapter 177: That's It?

Lin Jie narrowed his eyes. *He said his real name, just like that...*

Even though it's only half, wouldn't it be more than enough if the Central Police Unit checked this person's identity with a name of this degree of accuracy?

Being called Michael now is probably his internal code name within the organization.

And this long-sword with the red cross sheath... It doesn't seem like a coincidence. Perhaps this organization might possibly have ties to Judaism or something similar to it.

This was Lin Jie's first time coming across such information in Azir.

There wasn't such rarity or uniqueness with regards to such a faith amongst even the general public from what Lin Jie had known previously.

A lot of information could be inferred from just this alone. As long as Lin Jie investigated more, he reckoned he could get to the bottom of it.

Is this kid overly excited, or does he have other backers to rely on?

But when he thought about it from a different perspective, Lin Jie felt that something that could be handed over so easily was most likely fake.

It was impossible for Lin Jie to verify the authenticity of this so-called real name, and he had no way of tracking down anything with the code name Michael. All of this information would have to be delayed.

All of this might seem important but would be utterly useless if they couldn't be verified.

Someone else in the same position might have really been fooled, but Lin Jie was experienced and couldn't be tricked easily.

Given how easily it had been for Cherry to entice a trusted aide of Congreve's to her side, the human skin book might seem important, but its contents required translations that would take quite some time.

And during this period, the human skin book had been used to draw a 'killer' over.

Lin Jie suddenly had a thought. *But since it's Christianity... Could there be some sort of common connection between Earth and Azir?*

This was his first time experiencing something familiar in this strange world.

Could this be the reason why Blackie teleported me here?

It seemed like he had no choice but to investigate this organization.

After Lin Jie finished deliberating, he shook his head and chuckled, "That's it?"

He looked Michael in the eye and spoke in a manner that seemed to imply something, "Young Mike, don't try and use this sort of thing to fool others. Did you really think that I wouldn't know?"

Young... Young Mike?!

What sort of nickname is this!

Michael's expression was so ugly it couldn't be put into words. He felt his pride and self-restraint take a hit, and he had a severe urge to hit someone. However, he couldn't strike the person in front of him and could only endure it.

But to a certain extent... The way the bookstore owner called him was confirmation of his status as an elder.

However, these were all minor issues. The real reason why Michael's face was so dark was due to the latter half of the sentence

—
He knows everything again?!

Does he know my real name, what Michael represents, or everything else that I'm hiding?!

Regardless of whichever, it all made Michael's heart sink.

Lin Jie noticed the uncertain expression on the face of the golden-haired man and decided to make a bold guess.

In any case, the other party's fate was in his hands right now, so even a wrong guess that might give the gig up wouldn't embarrass him too much.

Lin Jie had no intentions of going easy on such a person that was courting death from the get-go.

In actuality, Michael was tethering on the verge of death and would probably die on the spot if he didn't receive medical treatment within half an hour.

Lin Jie flashed his usual smile as if he knew everything and said, "Metatron, Raziel, Cassiel, Zadkiel, Camael, Michael... There are 10 in total, do you want me to continue?"

Lin Jie knew that his guess was spot-on the moment he said the first name.

Not only was there a sudden change in Michael's expression, but his breathing had also become labored and his pupils instantly shrank. The magnitude of the change far surpassed everything from before.

His face wouldn't have changed that drastically even if he was beaten to a pulp after striding in fearlessly.

This was even comparable to a Sichuan face-changing performance.

In truth, Michael's mentality had completely crumbled.

Nobody besides the original ten had ever known all the code names

of the Path of the Flaming Sword founders... Each of them acted individually most of the time.

They were all beings that had already reached the apex in this world, and each had their way of thought and plans. Only in occasional situations requiring assistance did they contact the others.

Only each of their immediate subordinates, for example the current Church of the Dome's Pope Rodney, who was trained by Gabriel, were entitled to know their respective superior's code name.

But the others' code names would basically never be revealed to anyone else.

Michael was convinced that no one knew... till now.

Glancing at Lin Jie's calm smile and dark mysterious eyes that seemed to hide extraordinary intellect, Michael experienced for the first time the spine-chilling sensation of being completely seen through.

Perhaps, their victims had felt the same way when they had toyed with the fates of others.

How the tables had turned.

Michael answered stiffly, "This show of sincerity isn't enough..."

The other guy's tone was too calm, and his gaze too overwhelming.

This guy definitely knows way more.

Omniscient and omnipotent.

These words popped up in his mind once more, making him smile bitterly. Right now, it seemed like he had no choice but to admit this was true...

"It's fine as long as you understand."

Lin Jie smiled wryly as he continued his con. "Haa... To be honest, I

don't really know that much. Just these few names. This is probably all of it so you don't have to be so nervous."

Michael was speechless.

As if I'd believe you!

Michael didn't want to make any bets on whether this bookstore owner would divulge the second half of his real name as well.

He took a deep breath. It seemed like he would need to offer up something that interested the bookstore owner in exchange for his true identity.

Michael's own identity, as well as information about the Path of the Flaming Sword, were already known to this guy, so the only thing that would interest him now seemed to be matters which pertained to the Church of the Dome.

It's said that he takes interest in helping his customers, and that Vincent is one of them.

Besides that, he likes playing the role of an ordinary bookstore owner... could it be?

Michael suddenly felt like he understood the bookstore owner's logic.

He can't be all-powerful and all-knowing when acting as an ordinary bookstore owner.

So, even if he knows everything deep down, he would definitely have to find a reasonable excuse for him to know such things.

Such a reason is used to convince others, but he's definitely planned for the truth to be revealed this way.

It was just like this exact moment where Lin Jie clearly knew everything but was waiting for Michael to take the bait and divulge sensitive information.

And then assuming the role of an ordinary bookstore owner who

had gotten a hold of such information through informed sources and passing it on to Vincent.

This sort of weird personality is really befitting of an ancient monster...

With a straight face, Michael revealed, "The Church of the Dome has already increased the input of Holy Moon Essence within the church and will commence the second phase of the sacrificial ritual in seven days... Cough cough cough."

After speaking for such a long time, this body was already completely unable to hang on anymore.

But he still gave his all in keeping his eyes open, and as expected, saw Lin Jie's eyes light up slightly.

Lin Jie digested this somewhat great deal of information and muttered, "Thanks for telling me this... However, I still don't think you can be saved."

"It's fine."

Lin Jie expected to see a thoroughly hysterical display, but Michael was strangely calm, choosing forgiveness and acceptance with a bright smile on his face.

"I just had an idea... I would like to invite you to join us. How about that?" said Michael.

Chapter 178: I Know That You Know That I Know What It Is

Chapter 178: I Know That You Know That I Know What It Is

What's this? Have me join because you can't beat me?

Do you take me for a fool?

These were Lin Jie's thoughts when he heard this offer.

First and foremost, this organization was a bad one, involved in doping the Church of the Dome's congregation with addictive substances to the use of live sacrifices in the making of Congreve's human skin book.

Inviting me to join such an organization that engages in such inhumane deeds! Do I look like a bitter villain that's been through so much suffering that I want to inflict pain on the world in retaliation?!

And given that you look on the verge of collapse, even if I accepted your invitation to join this organization, who am I going to turn to if you die right here?

This is just ridiculous!

Therefore, there was only one single truth— *Young Mike is a cunning man.*

In fact, he doesn't want me to join but is just trying to shake me using reverse psychology because he doesn't have long left.

When hearing such a thing at a time like this, most people might think it so obviously false, that they might feel there's some truth deep down and start having doubts over the veracity of everything this fellow says.

If Lin Jie hesitated or was tempted, it would cause him to have

some inner doubt, and Michael's purpose would be achieved.

Haa... his mind games aren't that shabby, thought Boss Lin to himself.

Lin Jie sneered and decided to reject him.

But on second thought, the young man in front of him looked inexplicably like he was about to die, and whatever he had said was mainly useless except for the part where he was provoked to spill the beans, so it was better to play along.

Thus, Lin Jie felt that there was no harm playing along.

I'll pretend to say yes, and then get more information out of him!

The kindhearted and upright Boss Lin wasn't someone that would normally deceive others and had initially wanted to let Michael confess because the dying tended to speak their heart.

However, he never imagined this shameless criminal would still try to keep mum and even play mind games.

Haa... since you started it first, don't blame me for what I'm about to do.

It's all according to plan.

With a half-smile, Lin Jie raised an eyebrow. "Why should I join? Given this 'not too intelligent' attempt of a face-to-face assassination, I don't think I would want to do so."

After his previous few attempts at fishing for information, he had found Michael to be particularly responsive to provocation.

Lin Jie used the previous condescending style of ridiculing him which seemed like the best method to make Michael talk.

Indeed, Michael's face paled violently and he nearly lost his breath.

However, Lin Jie didn't know what was going through his mind.

Michael calmed down rather quickly and then had a smug

expression. “I know what you wish to say, but that doesn’t stop me from extending this information. Since you know our code names, you must also understand the meaning behind ‘Path of the Flaming Sword.’

“Isn’t it exciting if we are able to connect this path and get a chance to gain access into the unknown?” continued Michael with a completely serious look on his face.

“This is a truly great cause worth striving for. How would those foolish and mediocre mortals understand?

“As for wanting to help Vincent and so taking a stand against Gabriel is totally understandable. It doesn’t affect our cooperation.

“I only came here for you and I... I can even help you kill Gabriel if you wish.”

Michael’s eyes glinted with a sinister cold glow and the corners of his mouth split in a joyous curve. “I think we are the same kind of person, everything just for our amusement, isn’t it?”

Lin Jie was noncommittal about these obvious attempts at trying to entice him over and narrowed his eyes. Sure enough, it’s about the Path of the Flaming Sword... An intricate part of Judaism... Or rather, it’s more well-known name—‘Kabbalah(Tree of Life)’ or “Inverted Tree of Life”.

Lin Jie ignored whatever else that was said before and focused on the newly divulged information.

Using the names of the 10 archangels as code names basically gave Lin Jie bad vibes about this organization already.

As an academic of folklore studies, Lin Jie would have some rough understanding of this kind of mysticism. He was rather sensitive to it and had immediately made the mental associations.

The Kabbalistic Tree of Life was the blueprint of the universe created by God, as well as the spiritual structure and path towards the divine.

The fundamental structure consisted of 3 columns, 10 spheres, 4 worlds, and 22 paths.

Simply put, in layman terms, Kabbalah could be regarded as a secret martial cultivation technique. Through cultivation, via the paths (meridians) the ten spheres (ten realms) could be attained in turn, and the user would eventually become a god, or rather, a perfect person.

These ten spheres started from bottom to top, which is the path of man to god. On the other hand, the connection from the top to the bottom was called the 'Path of the Flaming Sword', which represented the outflow of divinity.

The ten spheres each had their own guardian archangels, which were the names that Lin Jie just quoted.

Logically speaking, this evil organization ought to use the Kabbalah. Do they think they are gods by insisting on using the Path of the Flaming Sword as a name?

There was another piece of information in Michael's words that he was more concerned about—The code-name Gabriel.

That person is probably the true mastermind orchestrating the Church of the Dome.

And it seems like the cohesion of members of this organization isn't strong...

"Since you are aware that I know your purpose, you shouldn't brag so shamelessly about all this. As if I need your help to kill Gabriel.

"You ought to take a look at yourself first. Who can you even kill in this state? You really would blabber anything when you are panicking."

Lin Jie immediately felt that his efforts were paid off and intended to press on.

Smirking, he went on, "That way of thinking isn't too bad, however, you ought to consider the feasibility.

“You guys haven’t been successful, have you?”

“Don’t you think it’s a bit too forceful by insisting others join just by spreading this fantasy?”

Lin Jie said all this affirmatively. If Kabbalah was so easy to achieve, then everyone would be a god.

What Lin Jie meant was that joining them wasn’t out of the question, but that Michael ought to provide more substantial benefits for Lin Jie to believe him.

In fact, he had seen through Michael’s current state and knew that this fellow barely had any substantial benefits to provide.

Lin Jie merely wanted to show the hint of willingness so that Michael would put in more effort in feeding him more information.

Michael got the hint.

He uttered, “Alright.”

BOOM!

A loud noise erupted from next door and even the ground shook violently for a moment before receding to small tremors.

Lin Jie was startled and instinctively turned towards the direction.

“Haha... Looks like Gabriel’s plan is going to utterly fail... I hope he can hang in there... Ha-ha-ha... Cough cough.”

Michael’s laughter had a hint of gloating. He then added, “My invitation will always remain open. I will welcome you at any time if you wish to join us.

“In addition, as a sign of my personal goodwill, Congreve Chapman will no longer receive our guidance. All resources and strength will be withdrawn from the Ash Chamber of Commerce.”

The light in his eyes gradually faded, and with his last breath, he smiled and said hoarsely, “I wish him good luck.”

As he finished saying that, Michael's body fell to the ground.

However, Lin Jie wasn't concerned about this. Right now, all he could think about was the situation next door.

Chapter 179: Gathering At The Book Cafe

Chapter 179: Gathering At The Book Cafe

It was 6.15 in the evening. Annie Tuttle stood indecisively on this unfamiliar street.

She reached out to straighten her knitted coat. A bag was slung over her shoulder, containing a bottle of water, some money, and a pocket knife for protection.

For some reason, she felt like a parent attending a parents' meeting, and also like a young girl who was about to meet an online friend for the first time, which was a recent trend.

Imagining the cautious look on her face right now made her feel like laughing.

In truth, she had indeed made some preparations based on today's gathering, based on her many experiences of going, so she felt that nothing would go wrong...

She just appeared like a housewife on a grocery shopping trip and not someone who was attending a secret gathering because of a strange dream she had, which did sound dangerous and suspect.

At least... It should be much safer with this plain and ordinary look that would let me blend into the crowd. Annie consoled herself.

She started feeling some regret by the time she walked to this street via the map as well as inquiring passersby. But having already come this far, she felt it would be embarrassing to head back, and thus, forced herself to continue to the designated place.

Athena would also be here after all, and she was already taking charge, so there shouldn't be much danger...

More importantly, Annie was here because she believed that Father Vincent was truly innocent, same as everyone else at this gathering.

Perhaps what they did would become the key to proving Father Vincent's innocence.

If she did nothing, she wouldn't forgive herself nor have closure if Father Vincent and Father Terrence had really suffered as they did in her dream.

With this in mind, though hesitant, Annie summoned the courage and came without her family knowing.

However, it was really frightening here.

The area around this street was particularly depressed and deserted, and it seemed everything was very shabby. A large part of this street was surrounded by enclosed construction sites.

In the dim evening light, these semi-finished buildings, some high, some low, looked like large giant beasts lurking in the shadows, creating a frightening effect.

The surroundings were so quiet that Annie could even hear her own heart beating as she walked alone down the street.

When hearing her own footsteps, she would imagine that someone was following her and that thought induced slight panic.

Fortunately, this street wasn't that long and after a short walk, she arrived at the book cafe where the gathering was taking place.

"Phew..."

Annie heaved a long sigh of relief as she looked at the lit-up unit before her, and her taut body finally loosened up...

She eyed the book cafe curiously, which seemed to have just been built, and her eyes lit up.

This building didn't seem to fit in with the rest of the constructs on this street. Through the gap of the curtain behind the glass door,

she could see a lot of seats and bookshelves. The decoration of the interior was original and unique as well.

As a woman, Annie was instantly drawn to this fresh and elegant style.

Looks like there are already quite a number of people inside already, but I don't recognize any... Father Vincent has helped so many. He's too good a man to kill Old Father Terrence and cause the deaths of so many like what the news reported.

Annie thought to herself as she drew up her courage to enter.

Just before stepping in, she instinctively glanced at the next-door bookstore.

Athena had said that it was a strange and sinister-looking place that rarely had customers. Moreover, it was said that the owner of the bookstore barely ever came out. Only those passing by would see an outline of a dark-haired man in black clothes who was always reading behind the counter.

Just like mysterious urban legends that were all the rage recently.

Whatever... The gathering's more pressing.

Annie shook her head and pushed open the door of the book cafe cautiously, parted the curtain, and stepped in.

Soft light illuminated the book cafe, presenting visitors with a bright and open sight. The ornamental greenery on the simple bookshelves around was pleasing to the eyes.

There were indeed quite a number of customers which Annie estimated to be around forty.

They were either standing or sitting, and a few had taken to sitting on the wooden floor. Some of them appeared like they knew each other and were chatting softly around a table.

Hearing the door being open made everyone in the cafe turn to look at Annie.

Annie was embarrassed and smiled awkwardly. Just as she was at a loss, Athena called out to her, “Hey! Annie, over here!”

Annie turned towards the direction of the voice and immediately saw Athena sitting at one of the tables.

Athena was in a blouse and jeans. She had a healthy tan, a head of dark hair, and bright, charming eyes. On her sleeve was a golden badge that seemed to be carved in the image of a sun.

Athena laughed loudly and waved, “Annie, my friend. Come quickly. I’m over here.”

The other people went about their own business when they learned that she was a friend of one of the in-charges.

Annie went to Athena and sat down beside her, immediately feeling relieved at having someone she knew here. Otherwise, she wouldn’t have known what to say.

Annie peered at the badge on Athena’s sleeve and whispered, “Athena, you’re amazing. This gathering just started and you’re already taking charge.”

Athena rested her cheek on her hand and chuckled. “I’m just lucky. When I heard the location for the gathering was here, I immediately said that I knew this area well and volunteered to be a receptionist to maintain order and guide some lost folks. I didn’t expect that the policeman would think it was a good idea and agreed to it.”

She pushed a drink to Annie while taking a sip of her own. “Originally, I assumed that my life would be boring now that the audio-visual store is gone, but I never expected the drinks of this book cafe to be so delicious... I think it is something called... milk tea, but it is also very different from the ones those upper class folk drink.”

Annie took a polite sip from the straw and her eyes widened.

Mhmm, what’s this taste?

It is really good...

Seems like a perfect combination to go with the bread from my home bakery.

Annie shook her head and tossed aside her habitual business thinking. *Now's not the time for this!*

She whispered softly, "Athena, do you know what's supposed to happen at this gathering?"

Athena's eyes narrowed into little slits as she indicated towards the counter. "See those two over there? The girl runs this book cafe, and the tall man next to her is from the Central Police Station. They will be announcing the charges against the Church of the Dome."

Charges?

Annie froze momentarily. She was confused.

Athena leaned in as if she was about to share a humongous secret. Her eyes sparkled with excitement as she said, "On top of that, I've just found out that this book cafe is actually a sub-store of the bookstore next door. That weird bookstore isn't all that simple indeed!"

Chapter 180: Death To All Apostates

Chapter 180: Death To All Apostates

Huh?

Annie looked puzzled. This book cafe was actually a sub-store of that quaint bookstore next door that was the stuff of urban legends?

Unbelievable...

Truth be told, it wasn't that surprising that one of the two stores was a sub-store of the other since they were in close proximity and had a similar nature of business.

However, the issue was that the style of this new book cafe was a world apart from the look of the next-door bookstore, so this came as a bit of a surprise.

The style of this book cafe was novel and elegant, whereas the bookstore gave off a dilapidated, strange and mysterious vibe.

If Athena hadn't said so, Annie would have thought that this style was a deliberate attempt to antagonize the neighboring bookstore and to draw more customers away via a contrast of styles.

"Interesting... Does the owner of the bookstore intend to use it as a counterpoint to the new cafe and then attract more customers over here so that the new store becomes the main source of income?"

Annie wondered out loud.

"Ha-ha-ha... You shouldn't think about everything from a business perspective!" laughed Athena.

She lowered her voice. "Father Vincent is now an apostate and wanted by the church. And from the dream we all experienced, there's more to it than meets the eye... But whatever the case is,

he's here as well.

"Think about it, would a place willing to provide him a location to hold this gathering be just plain and simple?"

The Church was still very powerful, so there was no way that the location for this gathering had been chosen at random.

This made sense and Annie couldn't help nodding along.

Athena felt pleased seeing Annie agree.

With a look of excitement, she continued, "Besides, don't you think it's way too much of a coincidence that this book cafe only opened recently?

"As though it was specially prepared for this gathering..."

Annie knew her friend was always fascinated by mysterious or dangerous stuff. Whenever she heard of anything unusual, Athena would always rush to join in the excitement.

There was even a period of time where she often said that Norzin's frequent gas explosions were actually fights between people with extraordinary powers... *What a wild imagination indeed.*

This time, however, Annie was surprisingly in agreement with Athena.

Although it wasn't because of Athena's analysis of all this.

As Annie was listening to Athena, she had also glanced at the counter where that young cafe boss was quietly watching everyone in the store.

The young girl had a delicate, beautiful face with dark, serene pupils like round obsidian. She wore a black-and-white dress similar to a maid's uniform but more complex and beautiful. With the lace headband in her hair, she looked cute, like a human-sized doll.

However, what drew Annie the most was the vibe this young girl gave off.

She was just standing there, yet it felt like she was as far as the horizon. Though distant, one could still feel peace and tenderness from her, as if being watched over by their mothers.

It sort of felt like... the moon.

Annie's heart skipped a beat. *Yes, the moon.*

The previous time she felt something similar to this was when she was baptized for the first time in the Church of the Dome.

This was also why she became a follower of the Church of Dome, believing that the faith held the power to guide people.

Annie discreetly surveyed her surroundings and found that while most present were practically strangers to each other, there weren't any disputes even with so many people present.

Everyone was conversing in a friendly manner with soft, polite tones, without the slightest bit of anger or anxiousness.

....They weren't whispering, but simply lowering their voices.

Annie suddenly realized something.

It was as if everyone had awakened the gentlest side of their hearts.

A strong sense of dissonance came over Annie—This was the energy she had felt when she was baptized!

Later on, the sort of peace she felt in prayer was more like an awkward sense of stillness, as if it was false and disguised.

This is how the true moon should feel like!

“Do you feel it?”

“The real moon?” Athena blurted out abruptly when she noticed the change in Annie's expression.

Annie turned and met her friend's gaze. A chill went down her spine as she recalled how it wasn't a 'coincidence' as well as

‘charges’ against the Church of the Dome.

Was this the truth that Father Vincent wanted to tell them?

If that dream was true and Father Vincent was falsely accused, then would even the moon’s faith be false?

In that case, has the Church of the Dome been concealing its brutal nature all this time?!

Oh god, could the largest faith in Norzin actually be...

Annie took a deep breath to calm herself down. While in her state of shock and doubt, the Central Police Unit officer standing behind the counter suddenly strode out.

The book cafe immediately fell silent as everyone turned their attention to the young man standing in the middle.

This young man was of course Claude, who had taken over from his subordinates that had spread word of this gathering and was now the initiator.

“Ahem.” Claude cleared his throat. “I believe everyone is here because of that dream, and since you all are already here, you trust in Father Vincent’s character and believe that the dream was true.

“Today, all of you will learn the truth.”

Claude continued sternly. “We have collected evidence of the Church of the Dome’s illicit activities over the past few years. This evidence will shine a light on their evils and reveal the horrors the church is doing to Vincent.

“However, there’s one more thing to do before we begin...”

Claude drew out his pistol and pointed the muzzle at one of the tables. “Would you like me to smash that communicator in your hand, Mr. Mole?”

Even though deep down Claude was a knight, his outside persona was that of a policeman. Guns were still standard equipment for

him.

Having moles reporting to the Church of the Dome appear here was well within their expectations. After all, the Church of the Dome's power and influence over the years was not to be underestimated.

The middle-aged man in a leather coat at the table was stunned. He stood up and raised his hands. "Hey, I have no idea what you're talking about. I came here because I believe in Father Vincent and wanted to do something for him. How can you just insult me like this..."

"Oh, is that so?"

A kindly and gentle voice sounded. The crowd saw Father Vincent, his eyes covered with a black cloth, suddenly appear behind the middle-aged man.

"I believe the gun was pointed at the table. Why were you in such a hurry to stand up? Are you that eager to confess?"

As Vincent strolled to the center of the cafe, it became clear to everyone that he wasn't wearing his usual priest robes but a golden robe topped with a diadem that looked more like the Pope's usual attire.

The middle-aged man's face darkened and he began to panic. "I was... I was just nervous!"

Vincent continued with a smile, "If so, you must be way too nervous... So much that you forgot to hide the explosives on your body properly."

The middle-aged man's expression stiffened, and in the next moment, turned sinister.

"Death to all apostates!" he shouted as he lifted up his leather coat to show a bunch of explosives strapped underneath.

Chapter 181: Hell For Only One

Chapter 181: Hell For Only One

Vincent recognized the mental state of this middle-aged man rather easily. As a former priest from the Church of the Dome, he had seen all types of believers.

The type before him now was clearly a true fanatical believer of the Church of the Dome.

A zealot that would sacrifice everything including his life for the faith.

This sort of person wouldn't believe anything bad said about the church. Even if a mountain of evidence was placed in front of his face, he would still insist that it was all the work of heretics trying to undermine the church.

Vincent had already taken this into consideration when he pulled people into his dream on a large scale. However, he hadn't eliminated these people from the process, for there was a different purpose for them.

One, it was to let them report this to the Church of the Dome and eventually draw the snakes out of the cave.

Second, and more importantly, it was to get these naturally rich resources to come on their own accord and add luster to the missionary activities of the Sun Faith.

This fanatical middle-aged man was going to become the perfect example for displaying the sun's might to would-be true believers.

In fact, Vincent's expectations weren't just met, but were even exceeded considerably.

The middle-aged fanatic pulled open his coat to show the roll of explosives strapped to his body.

Everyone in the room was startled and those nearest to him immediately moved away.

Explosives, of course, were a terrifying weapon to ordinary people.

“HAHAHAHAHA... Death to all apostates! Only the Moon is eternal and wise. Only the Church of the Dome can be the savior of us all! All of you can repent in hell!”

With a pleased look on his face, the crazed fanatic pressed the detonator.

BOOM!

An ear-splitting sound erupted, quickly followed by a fiery glow as fierce flames filled up his vision.

At the same time, a tremendous heat and intense pain swept over the fanatic's body. He could clearly feel his skin scorching and how his flesh and blood were being seared.

It hurt the most for him because he was in the center of the blast. This excruciating pain even made him feel a tinge of regret.

But the fanatic was filled with a great sense of joy and satisfaction when he thought about his contribution to the Church of the Dome.

At the same time, his hatred and contempt turned into a sense of triumph—

These apostates actually think they can do harm to the church. What fools they are!

The middle-aged fanatic gave a silent hysterical laugh. *These apostates...*

With his remaining eye that hadn't yet melted, he wanted to see the expressions of the others suffering and wanted to see those apostates screaming in the flames.

However, the middle-aged man was dumbfounded, his eyes widening in shock before turning into despair.

These apostates...

Beyond the flames, those people were looking at him with confused and shocked faces. But... it wasn't from being caught up in the explosion and neither did they seem to be in any pain.

They were just watching plainly.

Why are they just watching?

The middle-aged man was puzzled, but half of his body had already been destroyed in the flames. His brain could no longer support rapid thought and his sluggish mind couldn't comprehend the meaning of this.

His last look of this world was at the face of the person closest to him. An ordinary man that had been seated at the same table was watching him with surprise, relief... and pity?!

The middle-aged fanatic finally realized that for some reason he was the only one caught in this explosion.

Whatever flames that clouded his vision were the flames on his body.

The scenario he imagined of destroying the apostate stronghold in one fell swoop didn't exist. All this while, it had only been him consumed by the flames.

Everyone else was simply watching!

This was indeed hell, but it was hell for only one person... Him.

The fanatical zealot suddenly collapsed, his consciousness fading rapidly as all he felt was pain.

The church he believed in didn't protect him, nor would it gently guide his dead soul to the dark side of the moon to await a quiet resolution. Everything was false.

“Ahhhhhhhhh!!!”

The broken figure in the flames let out a final shrill cry of despair before being reduced to ashes.

Vincent gradually clenched his outstretched hand. At the same time, the invisible force containing the flames gradually shrank, eventually completely extinguishing the fire and disappearing into thin air.

Annie clapped her hand to her move, eyes wide open with shock at witnessing this scene.

Most of the people around her basically had the same reactions.

Only a few seconds had elapsed from the moment this middle-aged man revealed his explosives to blowing himself up and being reduced to ashes.

But everyone had seen the rapidly spreading flames forced inward, burning only the middle-aged man himself, without even so much as a spark escaping.

Those continuous explosions contained within that small area were mind-numbing to watch.

A whole, living person was gone in the blink of an eye.

And the source of this power was naturally Father Vincent who had only just let up.

Vincent looked around and said, "Alright, we can now officially begin this gathering."

"Wait, Father. What... What was that just now?"

Someone picked up the courage to ask this question.

Vincent replied gently, "Just as you saw it."

Soft murmurs went around the bookstore. Father Vincent had healing and exorcism powers, but this was clearly different from before. This intense, forceful power didn't seem like something the moon possessed.

That meant to say, Father Vincent's apostasy was true.

And whatever they had just witnessed proved how dangerous it was.

It wouldn't only be those fanatic zealots, but the Church of the Dome would act as well.

"Please quieten down." Vincent was very patient. "I know that all of you have many questions. I'll explain.

"First, the dream. I can safely say that it was something that truly happened, I experienced it personally..."

He went on to recount the entire affair of the Church of the Dome's usage of Holy Moon Essence to control the clergy as well as the attempts to silence him.

At the same time, Claude displayed the evidence to show the veracity of the matter.

Father Vincent had a high level of professional ability and his sincere explanation was sufficient to convince 70% of those present.

Vincent took this opportunity to spread the words about the Sun's Faith, and with the prior 'miracle' and Mu'en's naturally infectious nature, told them that it wasn't wrong to believe in the Church of the Dome's, just that this belief was wrong, arising from a false god that had stolen power.

The minds of all present started to buzz with the new information.

Annie turned over blankly and saw the excited look on her friend's face.

"Athena, do you believe this?" she asked with slight hesitation.

"Of course I do!" Athena was intently gazing at Vincent with an odd expression on her face. She rubbed the sun badge on her sleeve and muttered, "I thought there was no longer anyone in this world that still believed in the sun..."

“Huh?” Annie didn’t hear it properly and blinked several times.

“I know that the majority of you here are ordinary folk and I’m very grateful that you all have chosen to believe me. I won’t be forcing you if you choose not to join as well,” explained Vincent in his gentle manner.

“Of those willing to stay, I’ll choose ten amongst you to be apostles of the Sun’s Faith. You will each receive a portion of the Sun’s power, which means to say, you will become a transcendent being.”

The people in the bookstore exchanged glances and hesitated.

At the same time, outside the book cafe, ‘Blood Curse Mage’ Zuikaku with his corps of 50 magicians floated in the sky. Aetheric power was gathering together, forming individual sigils that converged into an array.

“Sea of Blood - Impurity Descend!”

Zuikaku had a cold glint in his eyes. This was nearly a Supreme-rank attack which would surely kill everyone in the book cafe.

The red-robed magician with a sheep-skull mask held his hands aloft, and a torrent of billowing vicious blood formed a sea of death with glimpses of limbs, eyeballs, and tentacles whilst a huge shadow swam beneath.

Whoosh!

A huge decaying claw emerged from the bloody sea, its front split into two appendages, with sharp claws on either. Countless squirming tentacles grew out from the rotting flesh, followed by a pale arm covered with black fur.

This limb pressed towards the book cafe with an irresistible might.

Wham!

There was a dull crash, but the image that Zuikaku envisaged didn’t appear.

The claw was obstructed right in front of the book cafe.

A silver mechanical arm had grabbed the end of this limb, holding it back with such force that the fur on the limb had been ripped away.

The sea of blood churned furiously and seemed to release a howl of pain.

Chapter 182: Unfathomable Astral Ocean

Chapter 182: Unfathomable Astral Ocean

Creak...

The silver mechanical arm clenched its fingers slowly but surely, causing a metallic crunching sound as it held the massive palm back, gradually pushing it back.

Scale-like patterns on the arm shone with a white glow, illuminating half of the being holding off the giant palm.

Grizzled hair, a resolute face, and a two-meter-tall frame built like a tank. His shirt was almost bursting from the rippling muscles that were completely taut from using all his strength.

The figure standing there alone possessed a powerful aura of deterrence, not to mention the piercing gaze as well as the fearsome aetheric field he had unleashed.

At first sight of this burly old man, Zuikaku and his magician corps were stunned as looks of disbelief appeared on their faces.

Destructive-rank Great Radiant Knight of Secret Rite Tower, 'Indomitable Sacred Flame' Joseph!

What the hell is he doing here?!

Zuikaku's heart tightened as he recalled the past deeds of this man, especially the previous person to have fought Joseph, the Destructive-rank black magician Wilde. It was said that Wilde had been blown up (real physics effect) during this battle of apex beings.

Joseph had also lost a hand from this battle and gradually regressed. Due to old injuries and backlash from the demon sword,

he withdrew to the rear-lines, going from the Combat branch to becoming chief of the Intelligence branch.

In other words, Joseph should have ‘retired long ago,’ but he was actually here waiting in ambush!

The thought of Wilde made the Destructive-rank Zuikaku shudder.

At the same time, he had some doubts.

He had clearly gotten orders from the top to deal with the Church of the Dome’s issue as well as the Ash Chamber of Commerce. There hadn’t been anything said about Secret Rite Tower being involved!

Damn it... We’re in trouble. We all won’t be able to escape unscathed today if we mess with Secret Rite Tower. Norzin is pretty much under their jurisdiction...

Zuikaku gritted his teeth and thought, *My mission can be considered accomplished if I kill half of the people in the book cafe. Joseph has been wasting away for so many years and hasn’t been in combat for a long time. There’s nothing to fear!*

Eyes gleaming from beneath his sheep-skull mask, he raised his pale bone staff, and the ruby at the tip glowed with a blinding light.

The sea of blood rose again, and out of it stretched countless pale bone-like hands that twisted around the massive arm as if they were blood vessels supplying blood to it.

Blood vessels and muscles swelled up, making the arm seem like an old, knotted tree root as it jerked forward once more.

Creakk...

Joseph could hear his mechanical arm straining under the weight.

He groaned, disregarding the strain. Aether throughout his body ignited, and because of the high density of aetheric fluctuations, it glowed like a brilliant white flame, exerting pressure all around.

This was how Joseph’s nickname ‘Indomitable Sacred Flame’ came

about. As long as he was still fighting, the intense white flame would never extinguish.

While Joseph's frame was considered large amongst humans, he was still just a fraction of that massive three-meter-long palm.

But that was also why the scene of him blocking that arm was so striking.

After two years, Joseph's first appearance in combat still held the same overwhelming aura.

Boom!

Sparks burst from the crevices of Joseph's mechanical arm as the massive force caused the metal joints to break apart. Even the metallic plates on it became deformed, cutting off the power supply.

The white glow around Joseph started to dim.

A few moments later, with his face and neck full of bulging veins, Joseph gave a roar as he stamped down, twisting his waist and 'ripping' the whole monstrous arm from the sea of blood.

Swish... Strands of squirming tentacles dangled from the arm ripped from the sea of blood, creating an extremely disgusting sight.

At the same time, Joseph's mechanical arm was completely twisted in the direction of that force, its outer layer ruined and now completely useless.

"How... How does he seem even stronger than from two years ago?!" Zuikaku gasped in shock.

The surrounding sigil array was also ripped along with that arm and largely disappeared.

Zuikaku could feel the aether reaching the point of exhaustion and reeled back in horror. He quickly gave out a command for his magician corps to begin mending the array.

But it was too late. After tossing the giant arm aside, Joseph ripped off his own prosthetic arm without flinching and stretched out his remaining arm.

“Blood Curse Mage Zuikaku. You shall be my first comeback victory!”

Corner of the lips curling into an excited smile and body glowing with a white blaze, Joseph shot into the sky like an arrow released from its bowstring.

Zuikaku was frightened at first, but when he thought about that great being in the next-door bookstore, he realized he wasn’t in any danger. After all, the appearance of a Destructive-rank was probably the worst that could happen.

There were only a handful of Destructive-ranks in the whole of Norzin, and Zuikaku believed he could take down this tiny little book cafe.

And even if he failed, once that great being made a move, death would be the conclusion even for someone like Joseph.

At that thought, Zuikaku stopped panicking. With a twinkle in his eyes, he gestured at his magician corps to destroy the book cafe while he took care of Joseph himself.

He raised his staff once again, combining sigils.

From beneath the bloody waves, where the arm had been ripped off, a giant clambered out with a low growl.

This was a grotesque humanoid monster. Its entire body was covered with black fur, and its sole remaining arm was exactly the same as the one that had been ripped off by Joseph just moments ago.

The giant’s skin was shriveled, green and basically decayed. At the sides of its head were two bulging eyes that glowed pink, and a massive mouth gaped from the top of its head all the way to its chin full of sharp yellow teeth.

“Sea of Blood - Impure Giant!”

This Impure Giant that Zuikaku had fed with the blood of countless possessed power at the peak of Destructive-rank.

“Go! Kill him for me!”

ROAR!!

Dream soil scattered wherever the giant stepped, shrouding the surroundings in illusion.

Zuikaku was confident in his own strength. *Even if Joseph is strong, Impure Giant is...*

He suddenly noticed Joseph smirking as what seemed like an expanse of stars appeared behind him. In the center of it, a vortex of complete darkness swallowed the arm that Joseph had just tossed aside.

Zuikaku’s eyes widened. *Isn’t this a sacrificial ritual—That arm?!*

Joseph hadn’t just tossed that arm away but sacrificed it according to a summoning technique from ***When The Stars Return*** , the book which Boss Lin had given him.

The stars are resplendent, the stars return.

Out of the dark vortex amongst the stars, a blurry figure rose with features so hazy it was difficult to make out. But beneath the yellow hood that was connected with robes of the same color, one could vaguely make out countless soft wriggling tentacles.

One of the tentacles stretched out from within the starry vortex, which drew Zuikaku’s attention.

He was first fascinated before being frozen in place. Then, his body started to tremble as if he was going mad.

For that tentacle alone was actually larger than the 10-meter-tall Impure Giant...

This tentacle that grew out from the starry expanse was like some great, indescribable horror from outer space. A tyrant of the unfathomable astral ocean, capable of stirring up nebulae and shattering planets at will.

Whoosh!

The tentacle casually coiled around the Impure Giant that struggled and howled before turning into a heap of mud.

Zuikaku was linked to the Impure Giant, and he coughed out blood as the sigil array all around him completely shattered.

With a defeated look on his face, Zuikaku's eyes followed the retreating tentacle into the deep darkness beneath the yellow hood...

By the time Joseph caught Zuikaku and punched him, the latter was already listless and drooling from his mouth like an imbecile.

Thump!

Zuikaku was knocked to the ground and tumbled twice before coming to a halt, but he didn't stop his uncontrollable giggling. He got back to his feet, limbs dancing and uttering gibberish.

Joseph took Zuikaku by the hand, confirming that the latter had lost his mind.

Feeling a little shaken himself, he muttered, "Boss Lin is really scary. A summoning of this level... What the hell was that?"

"Huu... Never mind. I don't want to go crazy either."

Joseph shook his head, and when he turned, saw that the fight in the book cafe was over as well.

Chapter 183: The Sun Is Calling

Chapter 183: The Sun is Calling

There were a total of 50 members in Zuikaku's magician corps. This might not sound like much, but it was a whole group consisting of elite Pandemonium-rank magicians, making the aforementioned number all the more significant.

In fact, being able to establish a new force like this was no laughing matter.

This can be attributed to the fact that there were only an average of 20 to 30 Pandemonium-rank members in a large majority of factions in Norzin. Of the remaining, 90% were usually Abnormal-rank, 9% were unable to even get a rank while 1% were of Destructive-rank.

As for Supreme-ranks, it was always the same few names circulating and were known to most like the back of their hand.

Zuikaku only needed to steer his magician corp in that direction and low-ranchers would come flocking like moths to an open flame, allowing him to easily obtain manpower to form a significant force.

However, Zuikaku scoffed at the idea of doing so and believed that quality over quantity was the only way to ensure absolute control.

As such, the 50 members of the magician corps were his everything, all of whom were his most loyal followers and disciples.

The reason why this was referred to as a 'corps' was that besides being a Destructive-rank white magician and nobility, Zuikaku had also been a general of a certain kingdom before Norzin came to be.

Sadly, this once prominent and powerful magician had now been reduced to a blubbering fool.

Of course, his magician corps that were dispatched to destroy the

book cafe were still unaware of this fact.

They had received the orders from Zuikaku to proceed on their own accord and were fully prepared to engage in a battle... or more fittingly go on a massacre within the cafe.

To them, the majority of patrons in the book cafe were ordinary folk. If the few transcendent beings present within were of Pandemonium-rank, it would easily be a thorough stomp. And even if there was a Destructive-rank, the task was still manageable with their combined force of 50 magicians.

All in all, the plan should go through without a hitch.

Yet in reality, as the first magician charged through the window head first, he realized something was off.

At the moment he raised his staff, he found his vision turn dark as a searing pain tore through his head, afflicting him with overwhelming shock, and he promptly fainted.

Claude, who was beside Vincent throughout his speech, removed his silver gauntlets from his fists as he took two steps backwards and flashed a bright smile at an incoming magician.

The aether within Claude's body was stimulated, and he appeared as if a fiery aura shrouded him.

Being Joseph's apprentice, his methods for harnessing and utilizing aether were the same as his teacher. However, given Claude's current aether concentration, his effect was limited. Compared to Joseph's brilliant blazing, Claude was still a long way off.

Regardless, this limited level of power was more than sufficient to teach these trespassing magicians a lesson.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Three magicians were knocked out by Claude in quick succession. But in the process, he was struck by some of their magical attacks and sustained some damage. His aether level had also depleted considerably, yet more intruding magicians were still pouring in

endlessly.

Given a rough estimate, the numbers on both sides would be roughly matched. However, the enemy regrettably consisted entirely of Pandemonium-rank mages while most on Claude's side were just ordinary folks.

If there had been personnel from Secret Rite Tower guarding here, the odds would definitely be in Claude's favor.

"Fortunately, they don't have the home-court advantage, otherwise..." Claude's expression was indiscernible as he nimbly dodged an incoming spell.

He noticed that most of the ordinary folk were already standing behind Vincent and shielded by a protective flare of Vincent's aether barrier.

This previously was a bustling bunch. While they had been horrified and traumatized by the sudden appearance of the crazed zealot previously, they were no longer as numbed with shock as compared to before.

Before the warmth of the first one reduced to ashes had dissipated, another wave of magicians appeared.

Witnessing the exchange of spells and aetheric powers convinced these people that extraordinary individuals really did exist in this world.

Some were wide-eyed in astonishment, some with clenched fists, others with worry as well as some that were simply at a loss.

Vincent furrowed his eyebrows as he made mental notes of this sudden attack of Pandemonium-rank magicians. The situation at hand was a precarious one, not because he doubted his own proficiency, but because he had to find a way to wipe out these intruders without causing any collateral damage to the cafe while also keeping the crowd safe.

These magicians were unlike the previous ordinary human, who could be overpowered with ease.

If the aether within an ordinary person's body was like a match which extinguished easily once lit, then transcendent beings could be likened to fully-filled gas canisters that would cause an explosion when ignited.

Not to mention, there are 50 of them present... Oh, There are only 40 left now.

Just as Vincent was about to test the power of Eternal Doom, a magician donning a red skull mask broke through his aether barrier, charging menacingly with his ice sword.

Shing! Shing! Shing!

The sword had a razor-sharp edge with a blade seemingly so cold it could freeze the water vapor surrounding it. He waved his sword in the air and dashed at a few nearby patrons.

Annie was amongst them.

She was stunned, or rather, completely oblivious to the situation. She could only catch a glimpse of a silhouette before a person suddenly appeared before her shouting, "Annie, back off!"

Annie was petrified. The person before her was none other than her best friend Athena!

This usually unassuming woman now had golden tattoos that glowed brightly on her tanned skin. Rings of fire combined in sophisticated patterns around her, forming an image of a radiant sun.

She raised and crossed her arms, muscles taut as she stopped the attack abruptly.

Her tattoo burned intensely, vaporizing the ice sword into a white mist. As the mist dissipated, Athena remained standing tall in that spot like a Goddess of War.

The magician who had charged into the barrier was no low-ranked magician. He was in fact an apprentice of Zuikaku, well versed in many aspects.

As knowledge was a strength for white magicians, he could recognize the hidden meaning of these lost tattoos.

“A Burning Remnant!” That magician stared at Athena and muttered, “I thought that it was only a myth, a long lost clan of powerful warriors that worshiped the sun.”

Athena shook the dust of herself. With an imprint of a glowing halo on her forehead, she simply scoffed, “I’m the only one left from the clan. Once I perish as an ordinary person, the Burning Remnants would cease to exist. Only then would it truly be a myth.”

The magician drew a sigil in the air, summoning an ice monster. “Then why did you reveal yourself?”

Athena’s locks flowed in the wind like a blazing inferno, turning a dark crimson.

She struck her knuckles together as she exhaled, “Because the Sun is calling for its people!”

Vincent had a premonition previously and had thus used ‘The majority of you are ordinary folk’ when he addressed the people who had gathered. At the same time, he was specifically directing it at Athena, whose heart was yet to be ignited.

He was now connected to Eternal Doom in the sky, and after hearing Athena’s words, he sensed the sun’s joy. With a smile, he promptly snapped his fingers.

When Lin Jie heard the loud commotion, he immediately lowered Michael’s body and rushed to investigate the situation.

He just stepped outside and saw that the cafe was unscathed and heaved a sigh of relief.

He was then met with Joseph hauling another person. After checking the later was fine, he heaved another sigh of relief as he now felt assured that everything was fine now.

Joseph inadvertently noticed Lin Jie, giving him a wave. “Rest assured, Boss Lin. Everything is now under control.”

Although ash and fog were constantly billowing out of the windows of the book cafe, many of the patrons weren’t too affected and even volunteered to help clean up the cafe with Vincent’s assurance.

The entire affair was resolved without leaving any trace.

Lin Jie grinned, walked over. “Joseph, it’s been a while. How’s the book I lent you? From the look of things, you seemed to have gained quite a lot.”

Joseph appeared energized and in high spirits, which was a stark contrast to his past disheveled appearance. It was as if he had been reborn.

Lin Jie believed that the book had definitely enlightened him.

Joseph acknowledged and glanced at the ‘bounty’ he had gained. “I was able to rediscover my past self thanks to you.”

Upon closer inspection, Lin Jie noticed Joseph was missing his mechanical arm.

Joseph glanced at his shoulder which was now empty and simply chuckled. “These guys were quite ferocious and not that easy to deal with. Losing my mechanical arm is not a big deal, I can always reattach another later on.”

Chapter 184: Joseph Began To Understand Everything

Chapter 184: Joseph Began To Understand Everything

Haa, this old uncle is as headstrong as ever... Making the decision to change an arm ever so casually, Lin Jie thought to himself.

He remembered that this kind of high-level mechanical prosthesis could completely mimic a real arm with little to no delay and was directly connected to the nerves.

In other words, whatever sensory aspects, including pain, were all synchronized.

Even though it wasn't bleeding after being ripped, the degree of pain was all the same, as if Joseph had actually lost his arm for real again.

But even in the face of this sort of pain, the old uncle remained unflappable and could even smile.

It's just like Guan Yu scraping poison off his bones. [1. Guan Yu from the Romance of the Three Kingdoms once got a physician to scrape poison from his bone while being totally unfazed.]

Perhaps due to his return to crime fighting and having achieved immediate success on his return, Joseph appeared overflowing with confidence and even looked ten years younger.

Lin Jie could only sigh. "Very well."

He glanced at the fellow slumped over Joseph's shoulder who was babbling gibberish as if he suffered from dementia.

Lin Jie couldn't help exclaim, "Poor fellow, this organization is really crazy for pulling off something as evil as this."

However, it's true that they are evil to the core...

The recently deceased Michael came to Lin Jie's mind. Not only had that fellow come barging in with a weapon with an intent to kill, he even hadn't forgotten to shoot his mouth off in an attempt to instigate Lin Jie before dropping dead.

From this, Lin Jie could see how deep-rooted the organization's brainwashing was.

Should this be expected from an organization pursuing the Kabbalah, Tree of Life and hell-bent on becoming gods?

And now seeing this poor fellow whose mind seemed out of sorts, Lin Jie suspected that this was one of their failed attempts at brainwashing.

"Organization?" Joseph caught on to the key word. Somewhat astonished, he inquired cautiously, "Boss Lin, is this another organization?"

They had originally thought that the ones who would come this time would either be from the Church of the Dome or working for them.

Joseph had been wondering when the Church of the Dome had begun contact with 'Blood Curse Mage' Zuikaku and his magician corps for them to provide such a large-scale undertaking.

Zuikaku treasured his magician corps, every member of which he trained himself. In the past, he would only dispatch half at most and had never mobilized the full corps.

With the Church of the Dome's strength, recruiting Zuikaku was reasonable, but it was difficult to understand how they turned up in full strength.

But from the way Boss Lin put it, it seemed like there was another organization pulling the strings from the shadows...

As for how Lin Jie pitied Zuikaku, Joseph found it perfectly normal.

This fellow couldn't even handle one of the summons from Boss Lin's book, so it was natural for Boss Lin to classify him as a

powerless weakling.

Recalling Michael's words, Lin Jie nodded and said solemnly, "Yes, the actions of those tonight, as well as what the Church of the Dome did previously, are all part of that organization's plans. The matter of Holy Moon Essence ought to be their doing as well.

"The person behind the Church of the Dome has the code-name Gabriel, and the Ash Chamber of Commerce has also been infiltrated by them. Congreve is one of those being groomed by them... But he should only be a peripheral member."

Joseph was flabbergasted and cried out at once, "Wait a moment!"

This relentless deluge of information made Joseph wonder if Boss Lin had decided to forgo keeping his cards up his sleeves.

Actually telling me the truth behind this matter directly is totally unlike Boss Lin's usual style!

Shouldn't he sit back and watch our investigations come up fruitless before coming and giving us advice and a nudge in the right direction?

Joseph asked tentatively, "Why are you telling me all this now?"

Lin Jie paused, scrutinizing Joseph's somewhat tangled expression. *Oh... They are still out there and it isn't such a good idea to give out such information too easily without the slightest bit of confidentiality.*

But... I've already finished saying it all. Now that's awkward.

"Ahem." Lin Jie covered his mouth, somewhat embarrassed. "I shouldn't have said it now, but this is all to it.

"I got all this information from a man named Michael, who came into the bookstore to attack me. I was acting out in self-defense and all this information came from his mouth."

Joseph's eyes darkened. It hadn't just been the cafe; the bookstore was attacked as well.

It's clear that this was well thought out.

This Michael person must be one of the masterminds and must at least have Supreme-rank strength to dare cross swords with Boss Lin...

Moreover, Joseph had been standing guard in the vicinity of the book cafe. He had only seen Cherry leave the bookstore but never noticed anyone else get close.

Someone who could pull this off had to be at least Supreme-rank.

While having unrecorded Supreme-ranks existing in Norzin wasn't very surprising, everything seemed to make sense given the recent reports of there being a mole in the Truth Union.

Church of the Dome, Ash Chamber of Commerce, the Truth Union... all of them have already been infiltrated by this organization before this Holy Moon Essence matter could be planned.

Joseph felt like he was beginning to understand everything and a chill ran down his spine.

How big of an organization and how long must they have existed in Norzin for them to have stretched their tentacles into so many other organizations without anyone noticing.

Could this organization have also planted moles in Secret Rite Tower?

Does Boss Lin saying that he 'shouldn't have said it now' mean that he already has a plan, or has he not yet decided and is waiting to see what their next move is?

Perhaps this organization's attempt to assassinate Boss Lin put him in a bad mood so he's decided to thoroughly eradicate them and lend Secret Rite Tower a hand.

Joseph looked around the bookstore and felt a tinge of pity for that person named Michael.

Given Boss Lin's past temperament, it seemed like this Michael was probably doomed...

Indeed, Lin Jie looked at Joseph and said, "Oh right. This person, he..."

“Understood.” Joseph comprehended immediately and nodded. “I’ll get Claude to deal with it.”

Whether it was a dead body that needed disposing or any damage to the bookstore, it was naturally on them... The intelligence they had gotten this time round was really useful.

Even if there was no intel gained, having a good relationship with Boss Lin was still necessary.

Lin Jie thought to himself that having connections was a good thing. Otherwise, even though he had acted in self-defense, he would still have to deal with unavoidable trouble for a while.

He glanced around at the slightly damaged bookstore, and his face sank. “These people are really guilty of terrible crimes! Let me go take a look at things. Hopefully my cafe... Hopefully no one’s hurt.”

With the snap of a finger, Vincent used the power of Eternal Doom and instantly carbonized all these attackers into ashes.

While those people present didn’t understand what was going on, the scene they witnessed was absolutely terrifying and those who couldn’t withstand it fainted.

Vincent had already observed the reactions of all these ordinary folk and already knew which ones to pick.

If there were anyone that decided not to join, he would get Claude to wipe their memories and send them back.

After all, cleaning up was Secret Rite Tower’s specialty.

Annie nervously examined the wounds on her good friend as tears streamed down her face. “Athena, you scared me to death!”

Athena sighed. “It’s alright, aren’t I just fine... Just that there’s no turning back now. Such is the fate of a Burning Remnant.”

Chapter 185: As Soon As Possible

Chapter 185: As Soon As Possible

Athena was a so-called ‘Burning Remnant.’ What she knew about this identity of hers came from her own elders, and the same could be said about her mastery of these powers.

However, in truth, Athena had no desire to revive or succeed all these and only wanted to be an ordinary human.

Therefore, in the first half of her life, she had lived among the ordinary from the time she left her somewhat mysterious family. But since she already possessed powers, she would always be curious regarding the transcendent and extraordinary.

So, even with an ordinary identity, she would always look out for various events caused by transcendent powers to get a glimpse of the world she had abandoned.

She was able to find clues that others couldn’t see, but she never told anyone about it.

For instance, with regards to this incident concerning Father Vincent, Athena knew from the beginning that the church explosion was actually the aftermath of a fight between two transcendent beings, just like all those other so-called ‘gas explosions.’

And from the moment where Father Vincent demonstrated the power of the sun in the dream, Athena knew that she could no longer escape. This was a call from the heart, like an instinctive beckoning from ages long past, forcing her to accept this destiny.

It was only now did she understand that the reason she continuously sought out traces of transcendent beings weren’t because of interest, but rather, the wild, restless nature of her ‘Burning Remnant’ blood.

She was destined to not be mediocre.

Athena took a deep breath, meeting the eyes of her good friend.
“My dear Annie, I’ve actually been hiding it from you all this time.”

“Is it the ‘Burning Remnant’ or something which that person mentioned just now?

“Athena, are you just like Father Vincent, that sort of... transcendent being he was telling us about?”

Annie surmised with a frown.

Vincent had already given them a comprehensive explanation on what transcendent beings were, and what the Sun’s Faith was.

Athena nodded. “‘Burning Remnants’ are descendants of the only tribe that from ancient times believed in the sun. And now, I’m all that’s left.

“Essentially, what it means is that I’m a believer of the Sun’s faith and worshipping the Church of the Dome was just a cover... Actually, we’ve never heard from the sun for over ten thousand years and thought that maybe the sun was already gone. I was even able to pretend to be a normal person and mess around.

“But now that the sun has once again reappeared, I as a ‘Burning Remnant’ must be the fuel to become the sun’s flame. This is our mission.”

Anne couldn’t help but ask, “What about Paul?”

The two of them both had families and had gotten to know each other at a certain women’s meet.

Slightly embarrassed, Athena fiddled with her hair. “That, ahem, has nothing to do with this. In any case, as long as the Sun’s Faith replaces the Church of the Dome, we will be formally considered clergy. Just like how the current Church of the Dome doesn’t preach asceticism unlike the Church of the Pestilence, we can still remain married.

“I’ll just keep him in the dark till the right time and everything will be perfectly fine.”

She hesitated for a moment, then went on, “Since we are already at this point, there’s one thing I’ve to apologize for. Look at me.”

Annie watched her best friend and was dumbfounded. The ‘Athena’ before her, a slightly plump and ordinary looking middle-aged lady suddenly became a tanned brunette of about 30.

“It’s a simple illusion spell we use most commonly,” Athena explained. “Transcendent beings have very long lifespans... Actually, I’ve already had three husbands. At the most I’ll get a divorce and start afresh.”

Annie was utterly flabbergasted.

It could still be said that Annie could accept everything that had just happened, just that her entire view of the world had been refreshed and everything she had ever known to be true was on the verge of crumbling.

“Well, alright...” muttered Annie stiffly. This was her best friend after all, and now that it had turned out like this, she could only accept it.

Others still cleaning up the cafe were in awe of this fierce female warrior that had shown up. Even though nobody came up to speak with her, they were still sneakily paying attention to the conversation between these two.

Annie was a little uncomfortable and whispered, “I didn’t expect Father to know a Central Police Unit officer and was able to get their help. He’s really impressive with his wide connections.”

Vincent had introduced the Sun’s Faith, but Claude hadn’t mentioned Secret Rite Tower. Therefore, Annie still thought that Claude was just a super cop from the Central Police Unit.

And was thus marveling at Vincent’s ability to casually make use of the Central Police Unit.

“I don’t know Mr. Claude. He just came to help for some certain reasons.”

Vincent suddenly walked over and took a seat. “The reason I’m alive, gaining my powers and having Claude’s help is actually all because of Boss Lin.”

He didn’t say that he had actually merged with Core of the Sun and was no longer human, but that he regarded himself as the pope and founder of this new faith.

Even though the Church of the Dome was destined to be overthrown, the Sun’s Faith itself was still lacking some things to firmly establish itself.

A convincing history for instance.

Vincent’s original plan was to get Boss Lin’s help, but this ‘Burning Remnant’, had appeared as an opportunity to solve this issue.

An ancient tribe of sun worshipers, isn’t this just perfect to supplement the history of the Sun’s Faith?

Thus, Athena had to be assimilated into the Sun’s Faith and become a bishop above the ten apostles...

... Even though this bishop had the style of a berserker.

Vincent had been listening for quite a bit and had ascertained Athena’s desire to be a member of the Sun’s Faith. Thus, he had come over now to extend a formal invitation, before starting to appoint the apostles next.

Annie found it awkward to face Father Vincent now. Even though they knew each other previously, the current situation was totally different.

Nervously, she made an effort to stand up, but Vincent stopped her with a gesture and smiled kindly. “Just sit and talk to me like a friend, Miss Annie.”

Seeing Vincent speaking and behaving the same way as before put

Annie at ease as she heaved a sigh of relief.

“Boss Lin?” she asked, a tad confused.

Athena interjected, “The boss of the next-door bookstore, I suppose?”

Vincent nodded. “Yes, a truly wise and powerful being.”

Athena gave Annie a smug wink. “Told you the bookstore wasn’t as simple as it seems.”

This invoked a great curiosity in Annie towards that old, dilapidated bookstore. Even Father Vincent, who had easily turned so many transcendent beings into smoldering ash, called the bookstore owner a wise, powerful being, and he must certainly possess immense power for him to have let Father Vincent survive the Church of the Dome’s attempts.

Annie pieced together a mental image of the bookstore owner—An old man with gray hair and beard, with eyes full of wisdom.

Just then, the door opened, and two men stepped in, one after the other.

A tall, burly old man with a battle-hardened face walked in, who had a red-robed magician in a skull mask slumped over his shoulders.

Behind him was a young man with short black hair and dark eyes.

When Annie turned, she wondered if the old man at the front was the bookstore owner.

Hmm... It really does seem like it. Although he seems to have an excessively overbearing vibe, the gray hair and aura seems to be it.

Others in the cafe had the same thoughts as well, guessing that this was perhaps the person supporting Father Vincent.

He seems very powerful indeed.

The young man following behind is probably an assistant...

Vincent and Claude also went up to them.

Annie watched as the Central Police Unit super cop waved to Joseph and greeted, "Teacher."

Then, he turned to Lin Jie and bowed. "Boss Lin!"

Huhh? Annie froze, her mind turning blank as she stared at the young dark-haired man in astonishment.

He barely looks like he's in his twenties!

Though a mother of two, Annie had married young and was only 25 years of age at the moment. This young man looked to be around the same age as her.

But when she recalled Athena's remark about transcendent beings having long lifespans, she accepted this fact rather grudgingly.

Lin Jie first nodded in response to Claude, then did a quick visual survey of the surroundings, frowning at every sign of damage he saw.

With a darkened expression on his face, he said to Joseph, "The Ash Chamber of Commerce should be able to pinpoint the place of exchange in a few days. You guys can start getting the public opinion news out as soon as possible."

Chapter 186: Disappearing Act

Chapter 186: Disappearing Act

Lin Jie's face darkened when he saw the damage to his book cafe.

Although the Ash Chamber of Commerce had taken full charge and forked out the money, Lin Jie had been the one who came up with the design!

All of this had been his painstaking efforts!

And now, Lin Jie was really incensed by the mess made by these killers who had just popped out of nowhere.

When he further associated this with the Church of the Dome's evil deeds, Lin Jie felt that these people no longer deserved to live a single second longer. In any case, the situation was now clear and they could continue with their original plan if the new faith was prepared and ready.

With the support of the Central Police Unit, which was sufficient to represent the official stand, as well as all the evidence collated, it wouldn't be difficult for the plan to succeed.

Lin Jie was just afraid that Church of the Dome would use unconventional means like this again in the future.

Moreover, the organization that Michael was a part of, Path of the Flaming Sword, had gotten involved. Besides Michael and Gabriel, whose identities had been exposed, there were still eight other members who were still scheming away.

Compared to the Church of the Dome, where tabs could be kept on, this manipulative organization hidden in the shadows was bad news...

Joseph, who had planned to do the same, nodded. "We've got men ready. We'll expose the Church of the Dome's dirt when we hear

from the Chapmans.

“Then, we’ll cooperate with the pushing of the new faith. I’m sure it will immediately cause the Church of the Dome to panic. And when they’re cornered and desperate will be when they perish.”

The former Great Radiant Knight’s eyes were piercingly cold, and he made a gesture of slitting one’s throat.

That murderous glare could easily send chills down anyone’s spine, especially so with the beaten up magician slumped over his shoulder. It wouldn’t be hard to imagine him drawing out his sword and cutting someone’s head off clean and decisively.

“Also, take special note of what I just said. The Church of the Dome aren’t the masterminds. There’s still another organization behind them, so be careful and stay safe,” Lin Jie said.

He paused slightly, then mused, “I’ll speak of this in detail when you come over to my bookstore later.”

Lin Jie hinted at the crowd. There were too many people here, and the more people meant more spies. Even if they claim to be followers of the Sun’s Faith, it could be all an act, and it was too difficult to determine whether they were spies here or not.

According to Young Mike’s last words, their organization had control of the Church of the Dome and were even supporting Congreve, who was a direct rival of Cherry in the Ash Chamber of Commerce.

These were two huge, well-known organizations, yet they had been infiltrated with who knows how many spies.

It wouldn’t be surprising if there was a mole among this crowd that hadn’t yet been busted.

Joseph looked grave. “Alright, thank you for telling us about this. Oh, aside from this, there is something I need to speak with you about... It’s something to do with one of your customers.”

Lin Jie raised his eyebrows. *A customer?*

He didn't have many customers in the first place, and he rarely contacted most of them. The two he had been in frequent contact with recently were Wilde and Ji Zhixiu.

Joseph wouldn't be speaking in such a veiled tone if it's about Wilde... So it's most likely Ji Zhixiu.

As a matter of fact, Miss Ji hasn't come back since she took my rose the last time. Has something happened to her?

But now isn't the time to speculate, I'll discuss it in detail with Joseph back at the bookstore.

"Mu'en."

Beckoning with his hand, Lin Jie called Mu'en over, who had been standing at the side as still as a decoration. With a smile, he asked, "Mu'en, by a rough estimate, how much losses for damages did our book cafe incur this time?"

Mu'en obediently worked it out in her head and replied, "About 17,000."

Although Lin Jie seemed calm, the corners of his lips did indeed twitch uncontrollably when he heard the figure.

Just what kind of high-grade materials did the Ash Chamber of Commerce use for the damages to add up to 17,000!

He did a quick glance across the store. The burnt floor, as well as the damaged tables and chairs, had to be replaced and that would be nearly 20,000. He hadn't expected it to be so costly, and this gave him quite a scare.

Back then, the owner of the audio-visual store was forced to sell the store directly to the Ash Chamber of Commerce because he had a debt of 10,000, which was then handed over to Lin Jie.

And in truth, with the purchasing power of Norzin's currency, to buy a shop in a poorer and more remote place for 10,000 wasn't really surprising.

However, it seemed a little excessive in this case.

Lin Jie felt as though he had shot himself in the foot. It was like he had lived frugally to purchase a luxury car, but he couldn't afford to maintain it...

“Ahem.”

Lin Jie turned to Joseph and hinted with his eyes.

I'm providing the new faith with a venue that also acts as a decoy to expose the Church of the Dome's true colors. Aren't I also giving you, the police, a space to enforce law, which is definitely a sacrifice for justice?

Shouldn't you guys express your gratitude?

Don't let the hearts of the righteous turn cold! The 17,000 which was sacrificed for justice is crying!

Joseph was moved by the look in Lin Jie's eyes. Not knowing whether to laugh or cry, he nodded and said, “Don't worry, Boss Lin. This is all our responsibility. We'll help you repair it.”

Once again, he thought to himself, *Boss Lin has a strange temperament indeed.*

With this said, Lin Jie was finally relieved.

Joseph spoke to Claude to clarify everything that had happened here. He gave Claude some praise and patted his disciple on the shoulder. Then, he handed Zuikaku over to Claude for him to deal with.

Claude looked at the still babbling Zuikaku, and with a slight smile, felt that his work pressure had just gone up a level.

Just a moment ago, Lin Jie had been chatting and laughing with Joseph without a care.

Those former Church of the Dome believers present, now members of the Sun's Faith, were all stunned.

They were mostly ordinary civilians and had known that Claude was an officer of the Central Police Unit. It was easy to tell that all ordinary folk had a sense of reverence for the Central Police Unit, judging from the former audio-visual store owner's attitude from before.

And now, the tall and burly old man had been revealed to be Claude's teacher, so naturally, he was of an even higher rank in the police unit.

But now, someone of such a rank was showing such respect to that bookstore owner, similar to how they normally revered the Central Police Unit.

What's more, his words seemed to imply that the Church of the Dome and Ash Chamber of Commerce were at his disposal and now they couldn't help coming up with all sorts of ideas on the identity of the bookstore's owner.

However, Lin Jie was oblivious to all the wild ideas that were going through the heads of the believers of this new faith.

He waited for Joseph to finish and brought the latter back to the bookstore.

The moment he stepped into the bookstore, Lin Jie stopped in his tracks. His eyes narrowed as he looked at the spot where Michael's corpse had been.

At this moment, there was nothing there!

Lin Jie had previously struck Michael instinctively—This was in fact, something he made up on his own. All the techniques Silver had taught him in his dream weren't something innate—which had countered Michael and killed him.

He was sure that Michael had stopped breathing and no longer had a heartbeat. But now, that fellow had managed to pull off a disappearing act right under his eyes.

Michael was gone!

Chapter 187: They Will Find It Difficult To Understand This

Chapter 187: They Will Find it Difficult to Understand This

Lin Jie froze for a moment, taking a deep breath. He then smiled casually at Joseph. "Have a seat first. By the way, what was it you wanted to tell me? That customer you are referring to is Ji Zhixiu, right?"

As naturally as he could, Lin Jie first went to the back of the counter and sat down, then gestured for Joseph to do the same.

Joseph looked all around when he entered, clearly sensing the aetheric activity that hadn't yet fully dissipated.

There had been a battle, albeit on a small scale, but the aetheric fluctuations were very strong...

Probably remnants of the fight between Boss Lin and that assassin.

There was some damage on the walls and signs of a struggle, but there weren't any bodies or blood to be seen.

Joseph couldn't help feeling an inexplicable sense of guilt...

He had assumed Boss Lin wanted to get his help disposing the body and assessing the damage, but now it didn't seem that way.

Right, how could someone of Boss Lin's level require our help over something as trivial as this. He probably found a random excuse to get me to come over.

As for the book cafe next door was run by Mu'en, she should be the one managing it. But Mu'en has just only been sent over by Boss Lin recently and that lass doesn't really open her mouth much.

So Boss Lin is helping her like this.

It's as if he's earnestly thinking on behalf of his disciple!

In a sense, Joseph felt that he was equally as attentive when he issued tasks to Claude.

Even though Claude viewed him like some black-hearted capitalist out to squeeze every drop out of his employees, Joseph behaved this way in order to train his abilities.

Joseph felt like he was using his usually calculative mind normally used to defraud more expenses to evaluate Boss Lin.

Lin Jie went straight to the counter after coming in, without mentioning the issue of removing a corpse which was supposed to be the agenda.

Instead, he could only get Joseph to talk about the customer rather than letting him know about his own lapse of judgment.

At this moment, Uncle Joseph, ridden with guilt over this misunderstanding, didn't know that Boss Lin was actually sweating buckets.

Damn it... how did an entire body just disappear after I stepped out for a bit.

Has someone taken the short opportunity to move the body, or did Michael not really die and was just tricking me to wait for the chance to slip away?

Lin Jie was more inclined towards the latter.

From Michael's tone, it seemed like there wasn't much cohesiveness among members of that organization. They didn't really care about the other members and even seemed to gloat about the misfortune of the others.

Furthermore, it seemed unlikely that an organization without any solidarity would risk others just to retrieve the bones of a dead member.

Young Mike isn't as simple as he seems after all. Looks like I

underestimated him and he even managed to pull a fast one over me just when I thought he was on the verge of death, thought Lin Jie to himself as he vaguely made some guesses with regards to this organization.

Could this organization's research on 'The Path of the Flaming Sword' have come to fruition? Or perhaps they may be some of the few people of Azir that have discovered the truth of history and want to recreate those mythical times and get close to those 'gods'?

Right, that strange human skin book was also created by them. This could mean that they possess some certain special powers.

Hmm... but from what I experienced just now, Michael wasn't a match for me which shows that their strength is still at a shallow level. For instance, the human skin book's ability to convey information is actually not much different from Blackie's ability to use water to create words.

Lin Jie couldn't help glancing at the counter-top, where Blackie had once communicated with him.

But they went through such trouble, even peeling people's skin to make such a book just for a simple function like conveying information.

Moreover, if their code-names were indeed according to the ten archangels, then Young Mike, who had the code-name Michael, ought to be ranked highly among the ten. The others would roughly be of a similar level, so he was not likely to be in much danger.

All in all, Joseph and Vincent will probably find it difficult understanding this strange situation. Haa... There's no other choice, I have to try solving it myself!

Lin Jie felt that since he was the one who discovered the problem of Holy Moon Essence and had gotten Vincent to test the Church of the Dome, he ought to be the one taking responsibility for these series of consequences.

Moreover, only magic could defeat magic!

According to Silver, Lin Jie would be able to protect himself completely once he could construct a complete dream realm. And if

he could use a basic dream realm as a frame to expand the dream soil to cover reality, he would have truly ‘mastered’ it.

Ever since that strange dream creature broke into his dream realm and combusted, Lin Jie realized his dream realm had inexplicably solidified considerably.

He was building the frame of his dream at a rapid pace and would be able to try the next step shortly.

So this time, the Church of the Dome would become his testing ground!

While Lin Jie was somewhat distracted by his thoughts, Joseph had already finished feeling guilt-stricken. He was firstly in awe of Boss Lin’s foresight, for that customer was indeed Ji Zhixiu.

“Rolle Resource Development reported that the Ash Chamber of Commerce are engaging in some illegal transactions and have already reported the situation to us, submitted witnesses and issued a notice saying that they will be restricting 50% of their subsidiaries supply of goods to the Ash Chamber of Commerce and will be sold to the Smelter’s Commercial Association.

“They must have been influenced by Congreve’s shady business dealings, mistaking it for an Ash Chamber of Commerce conspiracy,” said Joseph in his customary official tone.

The trigger for this had been Congreve’s creation of a secret trading platform, which allowed some greedy white magicians to sell the methods of removing their own ‘Loyalty’ brands. It just so happened that one of them was a white magician in the employ of the Ji family and a subordinate of Ji Zhixiu.

Even more unfortunate was Ji Zhixiu experiencing a betrayal previously, which added to her abhorrence for this kind of thing.

Although this incident wouldn’t escalate to a total falling out, Rolle Resource Development had still given a very stern warning to the Ash Chamber of Commerce this time.

“The situation with the Church of the Dome is still uncertain, and

not everything can be revealed yet. It will be some time before the truth can be told to Rolle Resource Development, but in this meantime, the Ash Chamber of Commerce would be badly hurt.”

Joseph eyed Boss Lin and went on, “I assumed that handling it as usual will do, as we don’t usually interfere in business matters. However, now that branch head Cherry Chapman is also a customer of yours, I thought I’d ask for your advice.”

Does this mean that young Miss Ji and Cherry will be ‘fighting’ soon?

Lin Jie placed his chin on his crossed hands as he imagined the inexplicable scene of Cherry and Ji Zhixiu going at each other with their fists.

Chapter 188: When You Read A Book, The Book Is Also Looking Back At You

Chapter 188: When You Read A Book, The Book is Also Looking Back At You

Lin Jie wasn't surprised by this. A conflict between Ji Zhixiu and Cherry was almost inevitable given the circumstances.

It would not make sense if there was any conflict between these two given the likelihood of it.

When it comes to business, there are no everlasting enemies or friends. Just interests.

Disputes were bound to happen as long as there was a conflict of interests between the two parties.

One was the daughter of the Rolle Resource Development Company's president. While the other was a deputy branch head of the Chapmans, which was one of the three families that founded the Ash Chamber of Commerce.

As a monopoly that controlled almost all business activities in Norzin, Rolle Resource Development had its eyes set on the flow of logistics and goods.

If not because they had been so focused on the development of the Lower City District and the growth of related industries, which took up most of their resources, Rolle Resource Development would have wanted to build their own logistics platform.

This had also given the Ash Chamber of Commerce a chance to take advantage of his hole. Moreover, the three family clans behind the foundation of the Ash Chamber of Commerce were powerful, otherwise, they too would be at the mercy of Rolle Resource

Development, just like the smaller Smelter's Commercial Association.

By the time Rolle's Resources Development was freed from the Lower City District, the logistics sector and goods channels sector had already been completely controlled by the Ash Chamber of Commerce. Even with Rolle Resource Development's strength, they were unable to get a piece of the pie and had to regrettably give up.

However, despite giving up, it did not diminish their desire and covetousness.

Ash Chamber of Commerce and Rolle Resource Development had a cooperative relationship with hidden competition beneath the surface. There were many examples of competition between the two, and it was Rolle Resource Development that came out on top most of the time.

In this current situation, it could be said that Congreve was holding the sword by the blade and this was a good opportunity for Rolle Resource Development to give their competitors a good blow.

— Lin Jie learned most of this logic via news on the television. As a folklore studies academic, he didn't really understand all these complicated concepts about business well.

All in all, it seemed as if Ji Zhixiu and Cherry were destined for such a showdown since birth.

On the surface, it appeared like Cherry, who held real power, currently had an advantage over the idle Ji Zhixiu. However, when it came to comparing their backgrounds, Ji Zhixiu, as the destined successor of the Ji family, held a far greater advantage in this sense.

Lin Jie felt that he might not be able to do anything about this either...

The only thing they could do was to resolve this matter as soon as possible so as to minimize the severity of Ash Chamber of Commerce's losses.

Ji Bonong would also be coming to visit in person — Ji Zhixiu had

mentioned previously that she had personally suggested for her father to look into the possibility of working together with the bookstore.

Although Lin Jie appreciated her kind intentions, he always felt that this was a little ridiculous and completely unnecessary.

Cooperation was secondary, and his main aim was to avoid the loss of a big customer.

Ji Zhixiu and Cherry, these two are huge backers. Innocent, lovely, and gullible... I mean good-looking.

Although I might not be able to fool a cunning business tycoon like Ji Bonong, I still have to give it a try. Who knows, I might just succeed?

I've already won over Ji Zhixiu, and if I win over her father, I can earn from both generations!

After explaining his plan to Joseph, Lin Jie also detailed what he had learned from Michael, including the key information that he hadn't yet mentioned — The Church of the Dome had expanded the scope of the usage of Holy Moon Essence, and the second sacrificial ceremony would be held in seven days.

"That," Lin Jie said quietly, tapping his finger on the table, "will be the best time for you to act. Let Vincent blow the lid off all this. The public's disappointment with the Church of the Dome will soon be transformed into a belief in the new faith. When it has a firm foothold, there would be much less social unrest as well."

Joseph understood all this and nodded firmly.

All this was crucial information that was of great importance to him. This had also been the first time he had participated in a Secret Rite Tower's operation as a combatant since retiring from the front-lines two years ago.

This would be a battle where the Indomitable Sacred Flame reemerged!

Seeing the determination and light in Joseph's eyes, Lin Jie's

expression relaxed a little and he smiled. “It seems that you are certain of victory already, so I wish you a successful start and all the best. There’s no need for any other words of encouragement... Remember to change to a better arm.”

Joseph glanced at his own empty shoulder and laughed heartily. “Of course!”

“I have to thank you for the book as well,” he mused. “I couldn’t have gotten the strength I needed without it.”

Lin Jie shrugged and doled out a bowl of long-awaited chicken soup. “It’s your heart that is most important. When you read a book, the book is also looking back at you. The change in you will also change the contents you see in the book.

“What you receive is the power you already possess deep down, and nothing more.”

Joseph fell into deep thought. *So the strength and type of summoning are related to my spiritual strength!*

Moreover, from what Boss Lin just said, these summons are intelligent and have their own thoughts and ideas.

With that thought in mind, he felt as if the book currently in the cleft of his chest-plate had suddenly opened its eyes and was giving him a meaningful look.

Not only that. Those densely-packed books in the shelf behind Lin Jie seemed to be casting their ‘gaze’ as well, which gave Joseph the chills.

Are they also choosing summonings just like how people chose goods? Only when they are pleased would we have the right to summon and understand them.

Joseph forced a smile. As he remembered that Boss Lin’s alignment was neither good nor evil, the joy in his heart diminished slightly.

He shuddered and sobered up from that numbing joy from a moment before, sighing as he thought about Wilde whose

whereabouts were still unknown...

Does Boss Lin hide the whereabouts of this mass murderer and provide him with help behind that smile of his?

At this moment, Joseph felt like Lin Jie was a shepherd, smiling down on all the lambs in this world. Regardless of whether black or white, he would gently help these lambs up when they fell. While he appeared kind, such a being was actually indifferent to it all.

He bade Lin Jie farewell and returned to the adjoining book cafe, where the gathering was in full swing.

The Council of Elders' closed-door off discussion should have reached a conclusion. Once the issue of the Church of the Dome is resolved, perhaps it's time for the core of Secret Rite Tower to directly make contact with the bookstore.

—

In a distant place, a handsome golden-haired young man in a white robe was slowly walking along the summit of a mountain shaped like a dragon's back. In his hand was a red cross.

A flash of light suddenly appeared, causing a change of expression in this young man who extended his palm.

The light immediately flew into the palm and fused with his body.

A look of bemusement showed on his face as the fused memories of what had been experienced appeared fresh in his mind. The last scene ended after Lin Jie left and Michael's fallen 'corpse' turned into spots of light that dispersed into the air.

At the same time, there was a scene where a stone gargoyle took the opportunity to lick the residue of blood, flesh, and bones off the walls.

"Lin Jie... an unparalleled being that has never shown up in history before. Where exactly did he come from? But, it's interesting indeed!"

The young man smiled knowingly. “That gargoyle looks to have the marks of Augustus. Perhaps he might know something.”

Chapter 189: Black Magician With A Dog

Chapter 189: Black Magician With A Dog

A while after leaving, Cherry sensed the intense aetheric activity coming from the bookstore.

She immediately thought of that mysterious man that had passed her by.

“Looks like that person was more foe than friend,” murmured Cherry. “The Church of the Dome will still struggle and not go down without a fight, but it looks like Mr. Lin expected this and is waiting to get them all in one fell swoop.”

With Mr. Lin’s strength, it’s tantamount to suicide for those that come!

Bella could faintly sense the aetheric fluctuations as well and nodded. “Personnel from Secret Rite Tower are involved, and they have already been lurking near the bookstore.”

The two of them exchange a glance, marveling at how well Mr. Lin had foreseen how things would play out.

Cherry put this matter aside rather quickly as they returned to the Ash Chamber of Commerce’s site that belonged to the Chapman Family.

The headquarters of the Ash Chamber of Commerce was the Temple of Druids that lay in the forests beyond Norzin. The offices of the three branches were situated at the fringes of Norzin in the shape of a triangle with the Central District as its center, which facilitated the movement of goods.

As an organization founded by merchants, its purpose was naturally to seek more benefits for its members but also included the

collection of information, dispute resolution, and other functions, which was popular among scattered merchant groups.

After all, Rolle Resource Development, a behemoth that was formerly military, basically only accepted the elite and had nothing to do with the ordinary folk. In order to ensure their own interests, small businessmen naturally had to unite.

The Ash Chamber of Commerce was controlled by the druids and was reputed for their logistical distribution and auctions, providing normal goods to ordinary folk as well as distributing and circulating extraordinary goods to the transcendent community.

Thus, in actuality, the druid priest only controlled the upper echelons while the middle and lower echelons were kept afloat by ordinary merchants and workers who were oblivious to the transcendent community. The channels were also separate, and the trade of sorcery tools and other extraordinary materials were strictly controlled, with a special secrecy in place to ensure that nothing went wrong.

The three branches were respectively controlled by the three druid families. The Chapmans of the Eagle Totem, the Waltons of the Bear Totem, and the Sapirs of the Wolf Totem. The headquarters was managed by retired elders of the three clans and they were responsible for important decisions.

The druids of Azir viewed blood-line as extremely important, thus, a hybrid like Cherry wasn't viewed favorably.

Especially so given her half-druid and half-dark elf blood whereby her dark skin severely invalidated the natural favorable vibe that druids normally had.

Anyone would know that dark elves were the epitome of promiscuity and cruelty.

Even though she was never brutal to her enemies and only waited for them to switch to her side, she was still given the nickname, 'witch.'

But Cherry no longer cared about all these sorts of whispers.

All she needed was one person's approval.

"Bella, call David, Herat, and the others here. This is top secret, make sure nobody else knows."

"Yes."

Back in her respective branch, Cherry went straight to her office and prepared to gather her own subordinates as well as some 'advisors' that had 'submitted' to her to plan the interception of Congreve's exchange point with the Church of the Dome.

As this was a secret operation, only the most trusted members were involved this time.

Cherry had specially placed the mole who had previously gotten the human skin book by Congreve's side so he would be out of the picture this time.

While nothing had seemed out of the ordinary or flawed, Mr. Lin had said that there was a problem, so it was a very real one.

The exact exchange location had been determined long before.

Now, after having the spy probe back and forth a few times, they had encountered a problem that couldn't be solved.

"You are telling me there's no way we can break through the territorial boundary setup at that location?" Cherry frowned. "Congreve has really put in a great effort to actually use the family's secret druid technique..."

Just like how wild beasts would mark out their territory, a territorial boundary was a sort of high-level domain technique. Generally, such techniques are used when preparing to develop a new area, and when set up, could defend and prevent others from coveting it.

This type of boundary was a chore to set up, but it could withstand Destructive-rank attacks and only someone with the family clan's

blood-line could traverse through freely.

David, who was in charge of their military strength, nodded helplessly. “Although we know the strength of the barrier and tried breaking through it, this boundary seems to have been established temporarily and isn’t as strong as it usually is.

“However, breaking through the barrier would cause quite a disturbance, and our movements would immediately be exposed.”

Cherry frowned and sent her subordinates out of the office first.

Bella lowered her voice in worry. “Congreve did this to get you to go in personally and probably has an ambush lying in wait to kill you... If the human skin book was indeed a setup, then this would be a trap!”

With such a huge territorial boundary in place there, anyone could tell that it was a conspiracy.

Cherry shook her head. “Congreve’s deranged. He’s simply staking it all, burning all his retreat paths in desperation. He must have seen that he was already standing on the edge of a cliff this time round.

“This is such blatant and illegal usage of the Chapman Family’s secret technique, and anyone would be able to see that. Once the Church of the Dome is exposed, our family clan will be implicated. Those old fogies will definitely sever all ties and cast him out, making him bear the responsibility alone. At that time, he won’t even have his last refuge.

“But if the Church of the Dome comes out on top, he will be able to use the Chapman Family’s reputation and ally with the church and build connections. With everything in his grasp, he would have won.”

Cherry sneered as she went on, “He’s betting that I wouldn’t dare go in along and that our investigations would hit a rut at this place... However, he’s not the only one with a gambler’s nature as a merchant. Every single one of us in Chapman are all gamblers

through and through!”

Congreve was nominally Cherry’s young brother, but he was already forty-seven.

He didn’t have a drop of elven blood on him, neither had he achieved a transcendent level that would extend his lifespan. As a human of forty-seven, he was a tall, broad-nosed middle-aged man with an air of considerable authority.

With a frozen gaze, Congreve asked, “Is the deal all set up?”

“Everything has been arranged at the usual spot. We are still in the process of arranging with Blood Feast. The Church of the Dome has ordered a large number of materials this time round, about three times the usual,” answered the subordinate.

“They are really loaded indeed.” Congreve gave a slight chuckle. “The others have to be prepared as well. By the way, I heard Blood Feast has a new member?”

“Yes,” The subordinate answered. “A black magician with a dog.”

“Dog? Is it a summon?”

“Yes.”

“What level is it?”

“Pandemonium-rank.”

Congreve lost interest and changed the subject. “Is Cherry still searching for clues regarding the transaction?”

“She’s already found it,” came the subordinate’s reply.

“I’ll bury her on the spot if she dares come this time!” uttered Congreve with a hint of malevolence in his eyes.

Chapter 190: Absolute Confidence

Chapter 190: Absolute Confidence

Congreve's absolute confidence wasn't without reason.

Although Cherry had amassed enough status and power in the Ash Chamber of Commerce within just three years to outperform Congreve's many years of achievements, he was confident of determining the fate of this miserable bastard this time round.

"Status?"

"Power?"

"I will make you cast all of it away. You will have to rely on your blood-line to find where the exchange is held. Ha, you're just an arrogant little bird who overestimates your own ability, yet you're still unable to complete your goal without help from your family who despises you..." scoffed Congreve.

He had always known that there were people in the Chapman Family with a clear disdain for Cherry, and she too detested these cunning and treacherous clansmen.

She had always had a clear abhorrence for blood-line, going as far as to reject the skill and techniques of the druids.

Coincidentally, this was also Congreve's leverage against Cherry.

Moreover, this obnoxious little birdie was completely oblivious to her imminent transgressions. *Do you think it's just the Church of the Dome?*

No, no, no...

It's the twelve Pandemonium-ranks from Blood Feast.

That Destructive-rank from the Path of the Flaming Sword and his ten Pandemonium-rank subordinates.

A Destructive-rank and twenty-two Pandemonium-ranks!

Cherry, oh Cherry, you are stuck between a rock and a hard place...

“Ha-ha-ha-ha...” Congreve let out an uncontrollable laugh after imagining Cherry’s usually stony expression turning into one of indescribable terror.

He wanted to rile up Cherry’s inordinate desire to win, that wild heart too proud to admit defeat!

“Then,” Congreve’s eyes flashed with excitement, and he slowly rubbed his palms together, “I will personally crush and tear it apart.”

Congreve closed his eyes, casually sat down and began envisioning how he would annihilate Cherry and reclaim his rightful status.

He would then capture those who had double-crossed him to aid Cherry, skinning and dump them into saltwater.

Once he gained the position of clan head with support of the Path of the Flaming Sword, he would unify the Ash Chamber of Commerce as a whole.

The peak of his life’s attainments were just at his fingertips.

“But...” Congreve abruptly opened his eyes and frowned as a strand of doubt crept into his mind. “Why hasn’t there been news from Blood Curse Lord? Didn’t he say that he only needed to treat with a certain great being and deal with that bookstore owner? Shouldn’t he be back in a day if all went well?”

Ever since Congreve knew of the Path of the Flaming Sword and was inducted, the representative who communicated and gave out orders to him had the title of “Blood Curse.”

The two parties would communicate via the human skin book. The Blood Curse Lord would sometimes even send direct subordinates to

make contact with Congreve, but Congreve had yet to meet ‘Blood Curse Lord’ in person.

Prior to any transactions with the Church of the Dome, Congreve had always been providing a safe venue for Blood Feast gatherings.

— Congreve was naturally unaware that Blood Feast was originally established by Blood Curse Mage Zuikaku. And this had been according to the order of Zuikaku’s superior in order to select the qualified candidates for development.

Later on, Congreve realized that since he was providing safe venues for the Blood Feast exchanges, why couldn’t he do the same for other customers?

If this succeeded, as a middle man for unauthorized transactions, the commissions he gained would be significant...

Congreve had always been oppressed by Cherry in the field of commerce. With the majority of Chapmans’ supply and logistics dominated by Cherry, Congreve’s commerce returns saw a steep decline, which was so bad that he could barely afford to maintain the payroll of his subordinates.

With such nefarious thoughts taking flight, he could barely contain his greed.

Congreve then began to covertly manage transactions for clients, dealing with items which were illegal, dangerous, and unauthorized.

There were also some unusual cases, such as a white magician by the name of Haywood, under the employment Ji Family, selling the method of breaking his ‘Loyalty’ seal.

Despite the sky-high price tag, there wasn’t a lack of willing buyers, and it helped Congreve make a great fortune.

Nonetheless, Congreve still lamented the tomfoolery of the white magician. He compared Haywood’s decision akin to killing his own golden goose; he couldn’t understand whether that white magician was either too content with his current life or simply lacked

coherent thought.

Recently, Congreve had heard that Haywood had been unsurprisingly discovered and put to death on the spot.

This was hardly something for Congreve to concern himself with. He had neither revealed his true identity when carrying out such transactions, nor had he left any traces.

However, the Ash Chamber of Commerce had become the target of Rolle Resource Development's wrath, and a bloodless war of business was bound to happen.

But that's no issue. Once I obtain support from the Path of the Flaming Sword, I will be able to turn the tide and lead the Ash Chamber of Commerce to triumph!

Congreve thought to himself.

The Path of the Flaming Sword, a mysterious and powerful organization, would serve as his pillar!

As for his bastard half-sister who had obtained some sort of captivating power from the bookstore, Congreve would let her understand the meaning of true suffering shortly!

He was involved with the Church of the Dome in a large-scale operation this time around, and hence, the Path of the Flaming Sword had sent him aid to back him up.

Cherry's fate was now sealed!

Congreve scoffed to himself and stood up. He then barked out orders, instructing his subordinates that this transaction was of utmost importance and he would personally be present to host it.

Of course, he was mainly there to savor the look of absolute despair on Cherry's face.

The current Blood Feast convene was organized by a member with

the code-name ‘Soaring Wyvern,’ with the agenda of inducting a new recruit and acquainting him with the other members.

The venue of this convene was at 336th Avenue, inside a hidden room within a bar owned by a transcendent being.

The actual name of ‘Soaring Wyvern’ was Dunlop Gall, a Pandemonium-rank black magician specializing in creationism magic. He was an expert at creating patchwork monsters and had participated in many Blood Feast meetings over the years.

He had inducted many new recruits and had become quite a reputable and prominent figure within Blood Feast.

On this occasion, he would be inducting a newly recruited black magician recommended by another member into Blood Feast.

“It’s thanks to Siccardo being unable to attend that you have the good fortune of having me as your instructor today. The attendees here are all senior Pandemonium-ranks, and not something a new Pandemonium-rank can hope to compare with.

“Be mindful of your attitude and it’s best to swallow some of your pride during your first trade here to get on their good side.

“Do not aggravate the others or else you will end up suffering.”

Soaring Wyvern gave his customary lecture, as he tilted his head to the black magician following behind him. “Got it, Black Snake?”

‘Black Snake’ was the new recruit’s self-given code-name.

Those who joined Blood Feast were required to don on masks for anonymity and only refer to each other via their code-names.

The new recruit was dressed in black robes with an iron mask affixed to his hood, revealing beady snake-like pupils.

With a slightly hoarse voice, Black Snake meekly replied, “Understood.”

.

The large dog with snow white fur beside his feet suddenly let out a loud bark, then stuck out its tongue and panted in a rather aloof and especially innocent expression.

Soaring Dragon nodded in satisfaction, but suddenly heaved a sigh. “Are you of snake-man blood?”

“Mhm.”

“I can see that. Judging from your attire, you are trying to imitate the ‘Faceless Black-scaled Man,’ right?”

We are hosted novel, find us on google.

Black Snake paused in his stride and looked up at Soaring Wyvern.

Soaring Wyvern gave Black Snake a look of tacit approval and chuckled awkwardly while rubbing his hands in embarrassment. “Actually, Wilde is my idol too.”

Chapter 191: My Idol, Wilde

Chapter 191: My Idol, Wilde

Black Magician Dunlop Gall, code-name “Soaring Wyvern,” by tradition, was a rogue magician.

Also the kind most despised by orthodox magicians that believed in the passing down of skills.

He was not taught by any teacher, nor were his powers inherited. All the skills he had learned till now were things he had pieced together or learned secretly. Some he had even snatched from others via the use of memory-stealing spells. There were even some which he created himself by merging certain spells of special languages.

In other words, he was an independent magician that had no affiliation.

In essence, he was just like the creations which he excelled in, a “patchwork monster.”

But on the other hand, he was able to surpass those ‘academic-styled’ magicians and became a powerful Pandemonium-rank magician, even though he was self-taught. Without a doubt, he possessed talent, luck, and endeavor.

Perhaps with a decent teacher, his achievements would far surpass what he had currently.

But that might have stifled that wild and unrestrained nature of his, which might have resulted in him being like the ‘academic-styled’ ordinary and nondescript magicians.

But in reality, when Gall was still just an Abnormal-rank magician, there was no lack of higher-ranked magicians who approached him willing to make the gifted rogue magician their disciple.

However, rouge magicians despised those spells that could be learned directly from a teacher or from a magic academy. They thought of them as non-practical and just for show, just like flowers in a conservatory. These rouge magicians disdained to even be with these “academic-styled” magicians.

And Gall, who had already managed to find his way into the Blood Feast, didn't really feel that he could really learn much from these people.

His heterogeneous skills had long evolved into a self-made system, forming a unique set of theories and fighting methods. Therefore, he was very clear that changing these would be to lose his greatest advantage.

Gall often said, “One of the favorite things of I, the Soaring Wyvern, likes to say is no to those self-important people!”

Then, he would be chased and hunted down by those angry higher-ranked senior magicians.

Of course, after he managed to gradually break through and reach Pandemonium-rank through cumulative transactions in Blood Feast, the Pandemonium-rank magicians that were hunting him down were taken down by him in succession.

In the end, there was basically no one that could be his teacher.

Almost no one.

One of the original founders of the Blood Feast, a Destructive-rank black magician by the name of Zuikaku, had tried recruiting Gall into his own magician corp and even went to the lengths of revealing his own identity.

Gall still refused, but this time in a more euphemistic way.

After all... He really couldn't beat a Destructive-rank.

Fortunately, Zuikaku had an entire corps and wasn't short of magicians.

Taking a fancy to this small Pandemonium-rank was merely a whim. There wasn't any need for Zuikaku to lower himself just to force things to go through, so the matter ended with proper closure.

Gall felt bad as well, but he had no regrets.

This was because had his own goals and dreams ever since becoming a black magician and was certain of the direction and type of magic he wanted to pursue.

All in all, it just came down to one sentence—

Wilde, forever the greatest!

"I can tell at a glance that you are imitating Wilde. Although I haven't seen him with my own eyes, I am very familiar with the way he dresses!"

Although Soaring Wyvern's mask was hiding the faces he was making, his excitement was still obvious.

It was easy to imagine how he had suppressed his excitement of meeting a fellow fan while going through routinized warnings and explanations of rules with mock solemnity.

As a rogue magician struggling to survive at the bottom of the society all the time, Soaring Wyvern didn't give off the cold elegance that society assumed magicians to have.

Having survived in the bottom rungs of society where the conditions were harsh with no one to rely on for support, Gall had to use all sorts of means to survive. Therefore, he became a smooth-talker, who could talk to anyone and everyone.

If not for this fact, he wouldn't have become a middleman for all kinds of connections.

"This black robe, classic!

"An orthodox black magician should always wear a black robe, and the thorn totem and sacrificial knife are a perfect match with it. As the disciple of the Black Emperor Augustus, Wilde is a true

orthodox black magician. He's the real deal! Those so-called 'academic-styled' magicians stand no chance! They're simply a group of brainless retards."

Soaring Wyvern exclaimed as he examined the hem of the newcomer's black robe.

He had completely forgotten his cynical disdain for all the orthodox magicians and did not even bother to hide his own double standards.

"You're wearing a suit underneath, aren't you? You've really captured the essence, these details are so similar to the original!

"Wilde is such an elegant old gentleman, and killings are like a ceremony to him. He never loses his style regardless of when and where."

Soaring Wyvern continued longingly, "I've heard he never lost the slightest bit of composure even when he was fighting Joseph. He's really so strong!

"And this mask is really iconic. I remember Wilde got his nickname from this. Legend has it that during his early years when he was still of Pandemonium-rank, he had a grudge with a Destructive-rank foe. Although he managed to escape being killed, his whole face was disfigured, and to cover it up, he wore a mask.

"Later on, he took his revenge, but he never took it off again to remind himself of this hatred."

Soaring Wyvern cheerfully commented on the newcomer's cosplay of Wilde and also carefully recounted the life story of the "Faceless Black-scale Man" as if it was a sacred tale passed down from generation to generation.

With a strange look in his eyes, the Black Snake stood in place, letting the man comment on him.

He had come here with almost no disguise. Of course, it was also because Wilde had died at Joseph's hands two years earlier according to most people. Thus, he had come over with such swag

and strut as no one would expect him to be the real deal...

As a matter of fact, after restraining his aura, most people he encountered assumed he was a pretender or a fan of Wilde's.

But he hadn't expected to run into a real fan...

"Moreover, you're of snake-man blood. That's a natural advantage."

Soaring Wyvern praised with a tinge of envy, then added, "But, your dog looks out of place. It completely ruins the vibe!"

"Growl..."

The large white-furred dog instantly let out a low growl, along with a slightly hostile look.

You're the one who's out of place! You're the one that ruins the vibe!

Soaring Wyvern's heart palpitated. For a moment, he felt as if something terrifying had set its sights on him, but the sensation disappeared shortly.

His eyelids twitched and he raised his vigilance when he saw the large white dog resume its cute posture.

This newcomer... Isn't as simple as he seems.

On the surface though, he chuckled and gave a thumbs-up. "But this dog looks extraordinary and has great potential. Ha-ha-ha!"

Black Snake stroked the dog's head and uttered indifferently, "His name is Grady."

Seeing that the newcomer didn't seem open to talk about his idol, Wilde, Soaring Wyvern attributed this to the new recruit having an introverted personality. He was probably embarrassed to be seen in this cosplay and likely didn't want to be exposed in public.

Soaring Wyvern showed his understanding. He coughed, then pointed to the door in front, resuming his formal tone. "Well, this

will be where the current Blood Feast is held. I'll introduce you to the others in a bit..."

Black Snake nodded.

He had already sensed the ten Pandemonium-ranks behind the door.

But besides that, there were an additional ten Pandemonium-ranks and also... A Destructive-rank.

Oh? An old acquaintance...

He smirked.

Chapter 192: Let Me Introduce You All To Our Lord And Savior

Chapter 192: Let Me Introduce You All To Our Lord and Savior

Cherry squeezed through the packed dance floor as she headed to the second floor of the bar.

While her movements were rather conspicuous and the unique apparel on her petite frame made her all the more prominent in this bustling nightlife scene, not a single person looked at her nor even paid the tiniest bit of attention to her.

‘Enchanted Heart Seal’ had evolved into ‘Enchanted Heart Alteration.’

‘Enchanted Heart Seal’ was merely the technique found in the first chapter of the book lent by Mr. Lin. It was an ability that caused those affected to show a positive affection towards the user.

Through years of honing, Cherry had already achieved the pinnacle of this technique. This ability of hers could affect those of Pandemonium-rank now, yet it could be said to be already pushing the limits of the technique.

Cherry would be required to occasionally reuse this ability alone on the target as well as conversing constantly with the Pandemonium-rank before the technique took effect.

She had never once tried this technique on Destructive-rank beings, or rather, she was too afraid to even attempt it for fear of the cataclysmic consequences should she be found out.

Securing the role as Deputy Branch Head were the eventual results of ‘Enchanted Heart Seal.’

She could now only rely on herself for further progress up the hierarchy.

As of now, Cherry had already grasped the basics of the secondary stage of ‘Enchanted Heart Alteration’...

This time, she no longer required the use of verbal connotations to invoke a favorable impression onto others. She could now cast the ability on herself to radiate its effects and set up a spiritual boundary, which made others view her with an ‘impression’ of her choosing.

This ‘impression’ affected the consciousness and awareness of those under the effect of the technique. The effects of this ‘impression’ would be stronger the higher the level of ‘Enchanted Heart Alteration.’

This was exactly what Cherry was doing now, creating an ‘impression’ of ‘non-existence’ that made others not acknowledge that she was present.

Sometimes, I really wonder just how strong Mr. Lin is... Cherry pondered to herself.

The ability to alter the perception of others was almost becoming a ‘law’ in itself, something Destructive-rank might not even be able to achieve, and was something only reserved to those of Supreme-rank.

Yet to Mr. Lin, this ability was merely a book amongst countless others in his collection which he could casually give out...

“Congreve, you brought this onto yourself.” Cherry stopped in her tracks and took a deep breath as she stared at the door of the private room.

She knew for certain that an ambush beyond her imagination laid within the compartment. Congreve would be a massive fool if he didn’t capitalize on this opportunity to capture her.

There is no time to lose!

The effects of ‘Enchanted Heart Alteration’ didn’t last long. She had to record down whatever evidence was available, destroy the good

of the exchange, and slip away all in this small window of time.

“You are wrong about one thing.”

Soaring Wyvern heard Black Snake speak up from behind him. “Wilde did not succeed in his path of revenge. In fact, the transgressor who disfigured his face vanished to a location where even Wilde himself was unable to find and hid there for several decades.”

Soaring Wyvern was momentarily stunned. He might have acted nonchalant and unwilling to continue this conversation, but deep down, he was struggling to hold back the urge of arguing back.

Sadly, now wasn't the time for an intense debate about their common interest, Wilde.

“There might indeed be other interpretations of this, but probably only those who have seen him in person would know what exactly happened,” said Soaring Wyvern with a sigh. “Nevertheless, Wilde is still nowhere to be found. Joseph has put up a bounty for two years already and has even increased it several times, but Wilde still remains missing.”

“Maybe he is already long gone,” Black Snake uttered softly.

“Impossible! Who do you think Wilde is? If even Joseph doesn't believe he's dead, how can we as fans be grim about his fate?” Soaring Wyvern exclaimed in disdain.

The more he spoke, the more agitated he became. Yet when he was reminded of the situation at hand, he waved his hand around and calmed himself down. “Never mind, let us continue this conversation when this Blood Feast is over.”

Soaring Wyvern didn't expect that this reclusive recruit would have replied at all.

However, he never imagined that Black Snake would directly cast a scrutinizing gaze at him and proceed to give a curt nod. “Indeed,

we can truly continue our conversation once this is over.”

Soaring Wyvern felt gratified at being able to warm the cold heart of a fellow with his enthusiasm as he pushed open the large door of the secret room.

Inside, ten other Pandemonium-rank participants were already waiting...

A crimson, golden-rimmed tablecloth was draped over a large table, making it appear as if the entire table was stained with blood. Exquisite and tempting dishes covered the table with a dozen golden chalices placed before each seat. The ritual was in full swing.

The ten present participants all turned their uniquely masked faces towards the door.

“Ahem, good. Looks like everyone’s here.”

Soaring Wyvern led the new recruit in and promptly spoke, “Please allow me to make an introduction. This is the newest member of Blood Feast, code-name Black Snake. Hopefully all of you can get along without a hitch in your future endeavors.

“Aside from that, we have another mission to accomplish today.”

He strolled to the head of the table and announced, “I believe every one of you have sensed the fact that this room connects to an adjoining room and that there are at least ten Pandemonium-ranks. Rest assured, they are not our enemy but are our allies instead.”

“Allies?”

One of the ten asked, “There’s a mission this time?”

Soaring Wyvern nodded. “Once again, I believe everyone is well aware that Blood Feast has always been hosted in safe and secure venues by the Ash Chamber of Commerce. This time, we have taken up a minor task from them that does not require too much effort. Of course, please take my word that we will not be the main force involved in this operation, the ones in the next room are.”

“What do we need to do? What about remuneration? Don’t even think that I’ll lift a finger if I’m not properly compensated. We aren’t some slave labor that can be used as others pleased.” The same member ridiculed as he leaned back into his chair.

Soaring Wyvern dutifully continued his brief, “If something is to happen later, we are only required to secure and seal the perimeter and ensure no one leaves. However, I believe the possibility of this happening is close to none.

“As for compensation, regardless of the outcome of the mission, each of you will be entitled to any one Pandemonium-rank item from the Ash Chamber of Commerce. If the mission is a successful one, a 50% discount card valid for half a year will be issued to all of you in addition. How does that sound?”

The ones present at this Blood Feast exchanged glances and nodded in symphony. All of them were thoroughly appeased by potential returns of this mission.

The member leaning into his chair spoke up once more, “Alright, as per custom, the newcomer will start off with the exchange. What’s your item?”

He glanced at the novice, then eyed the large white hound beside him. “It wouldn’t be this pet dog, right? I’ll admit, it is pretty cute, but I don’t think it has much value.”

There was a subtle shift in the mood of the room.

Black Snake walked forward, pulling out a book from within his robes and raised it high.

This immediately caught everyone’s attention. Printed clearly on the cover of the book were the six words: ***Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies.***

With rapt fanaticism, Black Snake pronounced, “Let me introduce you all to the great propagator of the Flesh and Blood Gospel, the first scribe of ***Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies.***

“He who is the mightiest, strongest and the most gracious. Our

glorious Lord and Savior, bookstore owner — Mr. Lin.”

His robe parted with his vigorous movement, revealing his masked face and snow white hair as well as the icy, acid green eyes that pierced the room with their serpentine gaze.

”W...Wilde?!”

Everyone in the room was flabbergasted as they pointed at him and were rendered speechless.

Soaring Wyvern let out a hearty laugh as he attempted to placate the others, “He merely looks the part, how could he...”

Before he could finish, an immense pressure of a Destructive-rank aura interrupted him. He was immediately dumbfounded and could only give a teary-eyed stare at the recruit with the code-name ‘Black Snake.’

Toying with his sacrificial knife, Wilde gave a graceful smile, followed by a courteous bow.

“Hear ye, hear ye. Let the exchange commence. Trade your beliefs...

“Or your lives!”

The large white hound beside him opened its gaping maw, so wide it stretched to the tip of its jaw, and continued past its ears and even its body. It was as if it was shedding its skin. Its insides were a fleshy mess, with writhing short tentacles and rows and rows of razor-sharp teeth.

Glug!

The wriggling mass of flesh and blood began to expand and stretch at an alarming rate.

Baam!

The long banquet table was smashed.

Crash!!

Sound of breaking filled the room as everything from the table fell to the floor. The ten Pandemonium-ranks were all scrambling for their lives, some among them so petrified with fear they nearly became one with the walls.

Eventually, the white hound became the largest occupant in the room. Its head, resembling a wolf's skull, was tightly wrapped with skin covered with boils and sarcoma.

Tattered and torn fur wrapped loosely around its frame. What seemed like a spine akin to blades pressed against the ceiling. Countless limbs attached to its body twitched erratically as huge bulging eyeballs were greedily eyeing the participants of the Blood Feast.

“No, no, no...”

One Pandemonium-rank member was so frightened his head shook wildly in disbelief, causing his mask to fall off. His legs were trembling uncontrollably as his pants turned wet with the smell of ammonia. He had wet himself from fear.

“Unwilling to do so?” Wilde's expression turned cold.

In response, one of Grady's limbs pierced this Pandemonium-rank member's lower jaw and exited right through the cranium, lifting his lifeless body into the air.

Before he even got a chance to explain, both his eyes had already burst out from their sockets and he perished.

Chapter 193: This Is Just Some Sort Of Demonic God!

Chapter 193: This Is Just Some Sort of Demonic God!

Crunch...

The entire room was silent save for the loud snorts and bone crunching. The remaining survivors of the Blood Feast were all rooted to the spot, trembling uncontrollably and not daring to move a muscle.

They had witnessed how that humongous creature crushed the unlucky soul in between its jaws as if it was feasting on a kebab, splattering the entire room in blood during the process.

Those wanting to scream at the top of their lungs to call for help suddenly lost their voice, afraid that it would be their turn to be asked the same question by Wilde before being sent to meet their maker.

Anyone that participated in Blood Feast was no simpleton, neither were they fools.

All of them were rather perceptive and knew that Wilde didn't really care about what they wanted to say. He was simply making an example out of them.

Whether they cried out or not, none of it would make a difference.

What truly mattered was being made into an example to show the consequences of rejecting him.

They had only been momentarily stunned by the grotesque beast and their minds went blank for a moment.

But seeing their compatriot turning into a skewer abruptly brought them to their senses!

This moment of clarity told them just one thing—submit to Wilde!

“I do! I believe! I believe everything that you say!”

The most cowardly of the bunch nodded vigorously, accepting the ‘Lord and Savior’ he had never heard about and giving Wilde a sheepish smile.

Wilde returned what could be described as a kindly and professional smile before gesturing to him, “Good, come over.”

The fellow that Wilde called over was in ecstasy. Overwhelming relief filled face as he quickly scurried in front of Wilde. “My name is Doyle, a hunter. But from today on, I am a devoted believer of Mr. Lin. Ask me anything and I will definitely complete it for you!”

He had no idea who Mr. Lin was, nor what power and authority he possessed to win over Wilde’s devotion. However, in order to save his skin, he would even be willing to believe in a flying spaghetti monster if asked to!

However, Doyle hadn’t expected his words of flattery so literally. Wilde glanced at him and said, “It just so happens that I do have something required of you.”

Doyle froze up as he mentally cursed himself for shooting his mouth off. He forced a toady smile and replied, “As you please, I promise I will do it well.”

“Finish reading this book.” Wilde passed the book he held to Doyle.

Doyle took it cautiously and eyed the cover. After concluding the book was not a monster in disguise and seeing that Wilde was serious, Doyle heaved a sigh of relief.

Phew... It’s just reading a book, you should have just said so earlier. ‘Bread’ really did die in vain.

‘Bread’ was the code-name of the member currently residing in the stomach of the beast.

The entire situation was ludicrously ironic considering his code-

name.

Fortunately, I get to live. Maybe I can even butter up Wilde and piggyback off of him.

He's a Destructive-rank magician after all. Never imagined that he hadn't died those years ago and seems to have even gone through a miracle!

These were Doyle's thoughts as he cheerfully flipped open the book ***Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies*** .

The abyssal contents of the book sent a chill deep down his spine and made his mind shudder. He felt as if he was surrounded by countless hands that was dragging him into eternal darkness and terror...

Yet throughout it all, his joyful expression remained plastered on his face.

The others who saw Doyle only being ordered to read a book all had their own suspicions. Nonetheless, the relief they felt was very real.

From the looks of it, if this person was truly Wilde, it meant that he really hadn't died and had relied on this so-called Mr. Lin to survive and hence become his follower and was now helping to spread the gospel of the Corpse Devouring Sect.

A missionary spreading a faith naturally needed people to become followers!

The dead can't become followers, so this meant they still had a chance to live!

Knowing this made the despair in their hearts dissipate slightly.

Yet in the next moment, all of them witnessed how Doyle's expression took a maniacal turn. His eyes turned bloodshot and started to bulge out of their sockets while his pupils spun uncontrollably. A disturbing "He he" resonated from his throat.

His hands holding onto the book trembled as if he were witnessing something traumatic. However, he just could not tear his gaze away from the pages.

Prominent bluish-green veins started forming on his neck, as if some strange unknown organisms were slithering under his skin.

“Ha ha... HAHAAHA!”

Doyle began to laugh ominously, yet in contrast to this, his expression only became more anguished. “Ha-ha-ha-ha it’s so scary... please help me hahaha... No! Don’t come any closer hahaha... Lord ha-ha... My Lord... Ha-ha-ha-ha...”

Splat!

Laughter came to an abrupt stop as Doyle’s entire head exploded.

The remaining members froze from fright. Those with keen eyes could even catch a glimpse of what seemed like tiny tentacles still wriggling on the blood stump of what used to be Doyle’s neck.

It was as if those blood vessels had come alive...

Hiss...

Those witnessing this inhaled sharply as a chill ran down their spines.

Wilde observed it all with indifference. He retrieved the book from the corpse’s grasp and said, “You need to complete this task fully. Because, you will die if you aren’t able to do so.”

He turned his gaze towards the remaining members. “What about the rest of you? Are you all willing? My patience is running thin.”

Every single one of the surviving Blood Feast members paled upon hearing this.

‘Night Falcon’ was the code-name of the member that had ridiculed Grady earlier. He was sullen now as he berated himself inwardly and no longer believed that the other party was still trying to

spread the word of gospel.

Dammit!

It's death either way, regardless whether I choose to believe or not!

Who would believe that he is spreading a faith?!

He's merely toying with us, sadistically tormenting us before sending us on our way!

He's definitely the real Wilde. Only a sadistic and insane mass murderer is capable of doing something like this.

To hell with this!

Regrettably, just as Night Falcon took a step forward, a tentacle pierced through his abdomen in that split second. His eyes widened in disbelief.

How is it so fast?!

Night Falcon suddenly recalled what the monster's appearance represented. "Sky... Sky Wolf, Ack!"

His face turned ashen as he coughed up a mouthful of blood. *Two Destructive-ranks, we never stood a chance!*

Wilde flipped open the book and placed it in front of Night Falcon. Tentacles latched on to Night Falcon's face, holding it in place and forcing him to stare at the pages.

"Ahhhhh!"

Thud.

Fate was kinder to Night Falcon as he managed to endure the strain of Mr. Lin's words. Only his eyes rolled to the back of head and he lost consciousness. Besides the loss of reasoning, he was relatively unscathed.

Wilde grinned at the remaining trembling members.

“Now, whose turn is it next?”

The remaining members all fell into utter despair.

What kind of book is this?!

Lord and Savior? This is just some sort of demonic god!

Despite their loud pleas for Wilde to stop, nothing could be done. Each of them went in turn until only three out of nine were unscathed... Physically unscathed, that is.

In the end, the one remaining person in the room still untouched and sane was the instructor, ‘Soaring Wyvern’ Dunlop Gall.

He was already numbed and in a state of confused distress.

_ Support us at hosted novel _

With his body pressed tightly against the wall and trembling greatly, he watched Wilde approach.

“I-I-I am willing, but I do have a humble request, no no no, a wish!” Gall warbled.

Wilde chuckled. “Our omniscient Lord will fulfill all of your wishes.”

_ Support us at hosted novel _

“Then... Can, can I please have your autograph?”

Gall asked as he fished out a pen and a notepad from his chest pocket.

Chapter 194: You Spoke Of Boss Lin, Didn't You?

Chapter 194: You Spoke of Boss Lin, Didn't You?

Wilde stared at the notepad and pen passed to him.

“What's your real name?” he questioned instead.

Right now, Soaring Wyvern was feeling a mixture of apprehension and excitement.

Apprehension obviously due to the pressure of the looming tentacles threatening to strike at any moment.

The ferocious wolf skull hidden within the giant amalgamation of flesh, coupled with the eyeballs following his every moment, kept reminding him of the ridicules the ‘white-furred hound’ had gotten just a little while ago.

The fleeting sense of danger he previously felt wasn't unfounded!

Right now, he could only rejoice in his own sharp senses. Definitely, his reluctant praise of the beast earlier had helped, otherwise he would have already been torn to pieces back then.

...However, that fate didn't seem too far away right now either.

On the other hand, he was excited because the person he had idolized for years was right before him, barely a meter away, and Soaring Wyvern had even asked for an autograph!

Furthermore, he was also personally witnessing Wilde's demeanor in person. From his elegant poise to his decisive disposition, every action of his was what Soaring Wyvern had imagined it would be.

Currently, Soaring Wyvern's felt like he was a fan in the front row seat of a concert shaking hands with his idol up close and personal.

At the same time, he felt a shred of embarrassment.

He had previously failed to recognize his idol and labeled Wilde as a Wilde wannabe as well as making many cynical remarks.

These remarks were of course an inner monologue, but the fact remained that this was definitely not the way Soaring Wyvern imagined he would be meeting his idol.

Any true fan that fantasized about meeting their idol in person would envisage a perfect counter, one where they could catch the attention and receive praise from their idol.

Not a disastrous scenario like this!

Soaring Wyvern felt beyond embarrassed. He originally believed that he had been ignored because Black Snake didn't want his fanaticism to be made public. But in the end, it was Soaring Wyvern who ended up exposing himself... and now he wished he could just kill himself on the spot.

But dying was another matter. Right now, he had to get that autograph!

With these sentiments in mind, Soaring Wyvern realized that his idol had actually asked for his name! Unable to control his excitement, he gave an immediate reply, "Dunlop, Dunlop Gall!"

"Are you a rogue magician?" Wilde queried further.

Soaring Wyvern was stunned. "Yes...May I ask how you know of this?"

Wilde answered indifferently, "You previously displayed a clear disdain for 'academic-styled' magicians."

"Not at all, 'academic-styled' magicians are all talented individuals. Pay no mind to my short-sighted ramblings..." Soaring Wyvern said as he frantically waved his hands and shook his head.

"Since you had such a thorough understanding of my entire life story, then you must know that I used to have two disciples."

Wilde appeared deep in thought as he spoke unhurriedly, “They would be those so-called brainless and retarded ‘academic-styled’ magicians you spoke about.”

Soaring Wyvern had no idea why his idol would suddenly mention his disciples. However, he could clearly make out the displeasure in Wilde’s tone, and the Destructive-rank magician’s expression was way more intimidating now.

I’m done for!

Soaring Wyvern felt on the verge of tears.

This must be karma, he thought to himself.

While singing the praises of Wilde, he had also inadvertently slandered Wilde’s disciples in the process.

Gall had long heard that despite Wilde’s cold and ruthless temperament, he had always been accommodating of his two disciples and they were like a close-knit family.

Therefore, insulting his two disciples and calling them mentally-challenged was akin to Soaring Wyvern digging his own grave!

Gall’s face fell. He never imagined that his waxing lyrical of his idol would actually... lead to his quick demise!

Forget it, dying at my idol’s hands is a worthy death!

“I have already completely expended half of my life’s energy on my two disciples. Besides researching the magical arts, grooming up my disciples made me fork out an unimaginable price. Hence, never again will I accept a third.”

Please stop, I already know how much you value your disciples.

Believing he was a goner, Gall wore a macabre expression, almost as if he was in mourning. His only concern at the moment was the fact that he was unable to obtain the autograph of his idol.

He tentatively raised the notepad and pen again. “Would you...

mind?”

Wilde eyed Gall, then grabbed the notepad and pen. Then, with Gall watching expectantly, he tore off a page and proceeded to pen down his signature before handing it back.

Gall received it in glee, yet just as he held the piece of paper in his hand, it combusted spontaneously, leaving behind a pile of ash that encircled him before disappearing into the air.

Gall was bewildered. Despite not being able to evaluate the general effect, he could indubitably still sense that this was a form of contractual magic!

“True Name Contract,” Wilde explained. “I’m currently lacking an assistant. You will follow me from now on.”

“Oh... What??”

Gall went through several stages of mixed emotion.

Initially, he was stunned. Then, he fell into a short moment of disbelief before it was replaced with pure euphoria.

Watching the tentacles retreat away from him made Gall recover from his daze. Catching up to Wilde who had already turned away, Gall rubbed his hands gleefully and asked, “Does... does that mean I don’t have to read that book anymore?”

“Of course...”

Just as Soaring Wyvern broke into a wide grin, the pages of the book were shoved into his face and his expression morphed into pure terror.

“Not,” Wilde added.

Cherry was surrounded.

The situation had escalated into one that was more precarious than

she initially anticipated... No, it had escalated way beyond that.

She hadn't expected Congreve had actually enlisted the help of a Destructive-rank.

A Destructive-rank hunter that had been missing for a long time.

The Destructive-rank hunter who had disfigured Wilde in the past, Harper!

"You really are one cute little mouse."

Scrutinizing her from head to toe was a hunchback with bandages clinging onto his thin frame as a black substance like crude oil oozed between the folds of the bandages.

He had sinister scarlet eyes that glowed with malevolence and wielded a pair of bizarrely-shaped machetes that were covered with either blood stains or rust.

He opened his mouth, revealing a slender, elongated and tri-forked tongue which proceeded to lick his blade. While doing so, he eyed Cherry greedily with a repugnant gaze.

Cherry was now trapped in the midst of four Pandemonium-ranks. During the preceding chaos, she had swayed the Pandemonium-ranks using Enchanted Heart Seal. Further combined with Enchanted Heart Alteration, she was able to turn them against one another.

Now, six of them were on the ground, lying in pools of their own blood.

If not for this Destructive-rank in front of her, Cherry's mission would have succeeded without a hitch.

Unfortunately...

"Cherry... You didn't expect this?!" Congreve stepped out from the shadows with boisterous laughter.

With lips tightly pressed shut, Cherry remained silent.

“Did you really think that you are the only smart one?” Congreve gloated. “Aren’t you supposedly good at devising plans?”

“Didn’t you think of me as a dimwit?”

“How about this, I’ll give you ten minutes, why don’t you try and conjure up a way to get out of this situation?!”

“Waiting for someone to save you?” Congreve sneered. “Will it be that pretty maid? Or that alleged all-powerful, omniscient bookstore owner?”

“Heheh, do you think he even knows? Why don’t you try screaming for his help. Perhaps he’ll come flying to save you!”

He gave a hysterical laugh before using a high-pitched tone to mock Cherry’s voice, “Kyaa, save me Boss Lin! Please save me!”

Boom!

The wall to the adjoined room came crashing down. A large writhing mass of flesh, muscle, and tentacles came barreling through. In an instant, the enormous beast occupied everybody’s field of view. Like a colossal serpent of flesh and blood, it sat in the middle of the combined private rooms.

Shick shick shick!

Before the four Pandemonium-ranks even had a chance to retreat, the tentacles skewered them.

As that happened, an elderly man in a gentlemanly suit and a dark iron mask stepped over the rubble and strode towards Congreve in a leisurely fashion.

“I seemed to have heard someone mention ‘Boss Lin’?”

Wilde reached out an arm, choking Congreve and lifting him up by his neck.

“You spoke of Boss Lin, didn’t you? But you don’t seem like one of his customers.”

Find the original at [*hosted*](#) novel.

Find the original at [*hosted*](#) novel.

Congreve struggled wildly and shouted, “Save me Mr. Harper!

“Boss Lin? That crappy bookstore? No way I’m a customer of his!”

Chapter 195: Retreat!

Chapter 195: Retreat!

“No?” Behind his mask, Wilde’s sinister, serpentine eyes narrowed.

His tone was one of pure asking. After all, as a loyal follower of Boss Lin, seeing someone shouting for Boss Lin’s help on behalf of a besieged enemy as well as slandering a patron of the bookstore before him were both baffling actions he hadn’t seen before.

But to a bystander, such a question was one that sent chills down spines.

After all, when someone drenched in blood and wielding a weapon appeared, one would still feel extremely anxious regardless of what that person said.

Naturally, Congreve was petrified, wondering exactly what had gone wrong and how another enemy appeared in such a crucial moment.

So close, it was just a little more!

A little more and Cherry’s life would have been taken by me!

The present Congreve despised the complacency of his past self from just a few moments earlier. If he hadn’t beaten around the bush, perhaps he would already be savoring his victory...

Sadly, no matter how hard he regretted his past decisions, time couldn’t be reversed. The only thing he could do now was to pray and cry for help.

At this very moment, his mind was buzzing with confusion. It was only after he vaguely saw the gory aftermath of the Blood Feast members skewered by tentacles did he truly process the nonsense that he had spouted.

This person is obviously affiliated with the bookshop... Isn’t what I just

said asking for a death sentence?!

We are hosted novel, find us on google.

“Wait, no!” Congreve shouted. “I-I’m one!”

Regardless if he wasn’t a patron, Congreve had just bought himself a few more seconds and this would definitely provide an opportunity for Mr. Harper to rescue him!

“Hmm?” Indeed, Wilde loosened his grip subtly as he questioned Congreve with a bright grin. “Then tell me, what do you think of our great master Mr. Lin?”

How would I even know! I’ve never even met him before!

Nonetheless, I am willing to bet that this individual must be a vicious and nefarious individual. Someone who could command a Destructive-rank fiend like Wilde can only be some demonic god, or at least, a lackey of one!

Congreve thought to himself spitefully.

But on the surface, he displayed a look of sincerity. With a strained smile, he sang praises, “He is undoubtedly the mightiest, all-knowing...”

By applying his prior knowledge of the exultation existing religions gave to their gods, he had now acclaimed Mr. Lin to be somewhat of a higher deity.

Congreve quivered as he gave high praise, the only solace he had to quell his dread was that his last hope for saving was nearby.

Destructive-rank Mr. Harper would definitely bail him out. Both him and Wilde were of Destructive-rank, so a fight between the two should at least result in a stalemate!

As long as he could slip away during the fight, he could then regroup and come back stronger.

He had already long established a partnership with Blood Feast and

was also the second most authoritative figure in the Chapman branch of the Ash Chamber of Commerce.

Not to mention that there was still the Path of the Flaming Sword to back him up if all else fails. Having been under their care for such an extended period of time, they would definitely send support to help him.

As long as he could successfully evacuate.

While holding to this remaining optimism, Congreve's mouth ran dry. He had already said everything that he could yet Harper hadn't appeared to save him yet.

His voice gradually softened till it finally went mute.

Only then did he realize the pin-drop silence all around.

No savior, and not even a single squeak could be heard.

Congreve's blood ran cold as he stared wide eyed at Wilde's amused gaze.

"Are you waiting for him to save you?"

Wilde mockingly loosened his grip, allowing Grady's tentacles to swarm around Congreve, immobilizing him as they rotated him around.

Having been back facing Harper since the confrontation began, Congreve could now finally witness what his last hope had been up to.

Grady had already occupied the entirety of the private room. Including the proliferating elongated tentacles, its body mass carpeted the entire region. The entire room now resembled a living nest of flesh and blood, continuously writhing and wriggling.

Its wolf-shaped skull rose into the air, slightly swaying like a rattlesnake.

And wrapped tightly within the living nest was Harper.

Innumerable tentacles were clutching his skinny frame, wringing him out like a damp rag. Copious amount of black oil-like substance was gushing out from within the folds of his bandages. A few of these tentacles even penetrated his body, seemingly like straws draining his mutated flesh.

As a hunter, Harper's black blood hailed from being a 'Formless One,' a type of dark monster that had no fixed form, having only a bandaged exterior maintaining their human shape.

As a result, his body was twisted like cotton. With many tentacles forcefully inserted into his oral cavity, he could barely make a sound. The only way to fathom his pain and suffering was by looking at the fear in those scarlet eyes of his.

He was in such indescribable anguish that he even cast a resentful gaze towards Congreve.

As if saying, *If not because of you, I wouldn't have met such a fate!*

Wilde chuckled. "I've been hunting Harper for almost twenty years, but he seemed to have disappeared without a trace. Honestly, I had already given up and decided to spare him because it was not worth the effort anymore.

"Imagine my surprise that you brought him out of his exceptional hiding and straight to me with just one command."

While he spoke, Harper, the once renowned hunter, already became a shriveled inky mass of a corpse.

Grady promptly devoured the remains of the Destructive-rank as if it were a plate of fries.

Congreve felt that something was seriously amiss.

The difference in strength between two Destructive-ranks couldn't be like an insurmountable chasm.

Harper, who had sold his soul to the Path of the Flaming Sword and managed to keep himself hidden for so many years, had offered little to no resistance against Grady.

Instead, he had been reduced to an easy meal.

“Oh right, I already knew that you aren’t a patron of the bookstore, which was why I asked for your opinion. I actually did so for entertainment, to give you a false sense of hope before you die, and hear your praises of Mr. Lin.”

This broke Congreve.

With tears streaming down his face, Congreve frantically shook his head. “No! Please don’t kill me! You can’t kill me!

“I am affiliated with Blood Feast, the Ash Chamber of Commerce, and Path of the Flaming Sword! You don’t know what you’re getting yourself into! You will definitely regret it if you kill me!”

With a chuckle, Wilde signaled for Grady to finish the job.

However, at this moment, there were aetheric fluctuations and a few new auras suddenly appeared. Wilde’s eyes narrowed as he cautiously surveyed the individuals that had appeared in the room.

Yet another Destructive-rank...

Indeed, among those individuals that had appeared via teleportation magic was a Destructive-rank.

Congreve could recognize that person just from his silhouette and began raspingly screaming for help, “Sir Lu, save me!

“Please save me!

“I’ve contributed a lot to ‘Path of the Flaming Sword!’”

Evidently, this individual was also a member of the Path of the Flaming Sword.

And he seemed to have some interactions with Congreve in the past.

“Silence!”

The individual who carried traits of a Northern-er berated. Dressed in what seemed like warrior garb, he unsheathed a long sword as he stared directly at Wilde.

Congreve had hope once more and he placed his newfound faith in this new Destructive-rank.

Wilde also readied himself for combat.

This Destructive-rank was in a whole other ballpark as compared to Harper.

However, before anything occurred, an aetheric fluctuation of transmission magic appeared around this warrior by the name of Lu, causing his expression to change. He waved his arm in the air and barked out, "The bookstore and Path of the Flaming Sword have made a deal. The top has given the order to withdraw any assistance to Congreve. All forces retreat!"

All of the newcomers who heard the order made a hasty exit and disappeared without a trace...

Leaving behind an extremely awkward situation.

Congreve could hardly believe everything that had happened.

The backup from Path of the Flaming Sword had left as quickly as they arrived.

How... Can this be?! I was the enemy of myself all along?!

Isn't the bookstore the enemy?!

Why is the Path of the Flaming Sword retreating?

How and why did a deal between these two parties form?!

If the bookstore isn't the enemy, then who is?

If the bookstore isn't the enemy but an ally of the Path of the Flaming Sword, yet I considered the bookstore as an enemy...

Unless...the enemy was me?

I was the enemy of myself all along?!

Congreve could only stare in stupor at the gaping maw of the beast devouring him as the last of his hope faded away.

Find the original at **hosted** novel.

Belch~

After the hearty meal, Grady let out a satisfied belch. His enormous body had received more sustenance, especially from the blackened blood of Harper which made the dark veined patterns become more profound.

Retracting all of its tentacles, it transformed once again, this time back to its original form of a large white hound. Its beady black eyes blinked innocently as it stuck out its tongue and began panting.

Wilde approached Cherry and asked, “Miss, are you a patron of the bookstore?”

Chapter 196: Everything Was All A Stratagem Of Boss Lins!

Chapter 196: Everything Was All a Stratagem of Boss Lin's!

Cherry had been watching everything unfold from the beginning. As soon as the Pandemonium-ranks were eaten up by Grady in succession, she ran to the corner to avoid getting caught up in the fighting.

Her heart pounded violently from witnessing this life-or-death crisis.

Battles between Destructive-ranks were rarely seen and usually once in a lifetime affairs... for one could easily be dead the moment they witnessed it.

Even though the entire room was largely occupied by that huge monster, there was still a space at the corner left by Grady, whether at Wilde's instruction or not.

Cherry held her head and squatted down in the corner, like an anxious little mushroom watching the center of the room anxiously.

However, there seemed to be a gulf in strength between the two parties of this battle. Cherry didn't see the earth-shattering scenes she pictured in her head.

The Destructive-rank hunter, Harper, didn't immediately close the gap with Wilde as she had expected.

From what Cherry knew, most of the time, a hunter would rush to attack and get up close with a magician foe.

After all, magicians are usually physically weaker and not good in close combat, so hunters would naturally use their strengths to target their enemies' weaknesses.

If a distance was kept, a magician of the same rank would hold a great advantage.

Back when Wilde was young and ignorant, it was such an oversight that allowed Harper to get close. Even though Wilde managed to avoid being mortally wounded, his face was torn off and that was how he got the 'Faceless' moniker.

And now, the two of them were practically in an identical confrontation.

However, Harper didn't have the guts to charge in.

Not only did he not rush in, he even started to tremble and backed away in panic.

Harper recalled the deep-rooted fear in his heart.

The grown-up Wilde was too frightening, just like a rational and intelligent wild beast. He was crazier, more savage and persistent than a hunter.

Wilde had hunted down Harper relentlessly, until the latter had to seek refuge with the Path of the Flaming Sword and eventually became a lapdog for the organization.

Harper lived in hiding for so many years, yet never once thought of using the Path of the Flaming Sword's power to change everything and take revenge because his spirits had already been crushed by Wilde.

Now, when Harper saw Wilde once again, his instinct was still to flee.

And it was this action that made Wilde discard any thoughts of 'reminiscing' or 'personally killing' and just got Grady to do the deed.

Just like that, a Destructive-rank died rather uneventfully right in front of Cherry's eyes.

She was utterly stunned and reckoned Wilde's power level was close

to Supreme-rank... Or perhaps already at Divine-rank!

This black magician that was one defeated by Joseph and went missing for two years hadn't died but instead had gotten even stronger at a certain juncture.

And that turning point was the bookstore!

Her eyes lit up as she felt a strange sense of 'camaraderie.' Nodding her head vigorously, she exclaimed, "Yes! I bought a book from Mr. Lin's store three years ago! I've reacquainted with the bookstore just recently and even helped renovate the new sub-store!

"Coming over here to investigate the exchange between Congreve and the Church of the Dome is also Mr. Lin's intent..."

Cherry recounted her story right from the beginning.

This was her first time coming face-to-face with another customer of the bookstore, and there was no doubt she harbored curiosity.

I wonder what book Wilde got from the bookstore...

Moreover, he called Mr. Lin his 'Lord and Savior.' From the look of things, he seems to be a follower of Mr. Lin.

Does that mean Mr. Lin has some affiliation with a faith? Could this be Mr. Lin's true identity?

Cherry felt apprehensive the more she thought about it, but extremely excited as well. It was as if she was now coming into contact with another side of Lin Jie.

"I see."

Wilde nodded with a slight smile. "You got to the bookstore a year earlier than me. Looks like you are a 'senior'."

Cherry immediately put her hands up and hastily rebutted, "You are exaggerating, it was just good fortune on my part. Meeting Mr. Lin is the best thing that happened to me. I've heard all about your past deeds. You are a senior to me in every aspect."

This was a Destructive-rank being and Cherry knew that very well. He was only being polite to her for Mr. Lin's sake. If at any moment he didn't feel like it, Cherry knew that she could end up just like Harper.

This amicable old gentleman had killed more than ten people in the blink of an eye, including a Destructive-rank, and was now speaking to her in a calm and gentle way.

It really showed what sort of character he had.

Wilde's gaze towards Cherry softened. "Originally, I joined Blood Feast because I wanted to spread the word and works of Mr. Lin. Just like your mission, this is the task Mr. Lin assigned to me."

He pointed to the other end of the room. Looking over, Cherry realized that there were four persons lying on the ground convulsing uncontrollably. Those were probably the targets of his preaching.

"I didn't intend to get involved over here, but Congreve's words and the presence of Harper made me change my mind."

Wilde reached into the mess and pulled out a contract, an account book, and a jeweled ring which he handed over to Cherry.

Cherry thanked Wilde as she took the items and discovered that it was indeed an agreement signed between Congreve and the Church of the Dome. The ledger in the account book had every transaction of 'Blood Feast,' and the gemstone on the ring was a tiny philosopher's stone that was an item from the stolen shipment.

"I know. Harper is the enemy you've been searching for all these years," sighed Cherry. "What a coincidence."

Then, Cherry froze.

Is it really a coincidence?

Wilde was involved with Blood Feast because he was helping spread the gospel of Mr. Lin.

Cherry herself was here to help Mr. Lin find evidence that the Church of the Dome was manufacturing Holy Moon Essence as well as to infiltrate the transaction venue and take down Congreve.

As it happened, Congreve had been helping Blood Feast facilitate a secure location, and so, the two had crossed paths.

Those enemies from the ‘Path of the Flaming Sword’ that had suddenly appeared would have been a handful for Wilde, yet suddenly withdrawn because of ‘a deal between the bookstore and the Path of the Flaming Sword.’

“I see you realize that too,” said Wilde. “Before coming here, Boss Lin once paid me a personal visit and used the Coin of Destiny to save my life. On top of that, he helped conduct divination on this undertaking and the result was ‘good fortune.’ Thus, I was fortunate to find Harper, someone I’ve been pursuing for decades to no success. And I remember—

.

“The Coin of Fortune has always been kept at the Ash Chamber of Commerce.”

Cherry felt as if her brain had been struck by lightning as everything came together!

She took a deep breath and said, “Yes, during the renovation of the new store, I got my butler to present the Coin of Misfortune to Mr. Lin as a gift. While I was tied up with business and unable to be at the bookstore in person, the butler said that Mr. Lin seemed like a clairvoyant. At about the time, the boss of the neighboring audio-visual store gave Mr. Lin the Coin of Fortune, and the two combined to form the Coin of Destiny.”

“That’s what I’m talking about!” Wilde was visibly excited. “Using your gift, Mr. Lin came to save me, and at the same time allowed me to find my sworn enemy of so many years. At the same time, we each completed our respective tasks. Your evidence, my mission, as well as making a deal with that ‘Path of the Flaming Sword’ in a three-way layout—everything was all a stratagem of Boss Lin’s!

“A meticulous plan laid out layer by layer. It’s just unbelievable!”

The two bookstore customers exchanged a glance, simultaneously marveling at Lin Jie’s inscrutable and masterful intellect to be in control of everything.

Chapter 197: Cold Norzin Winter

Chapter 197: Cold Norzin Winter

“Amazing,” Cherry couldn’t help exclaim in awe. “Everything was precisely set up by him already.”

Glancing at the contract between Congreve and the Church of the Dome in her hands, she shook her head and muttered, “No, perhaps since even earlier...”

From Wilde’s perspective, this matter concerned three parties — the Ash Chamber of Commerce, Path of the Flaming Sword, and himself, who were all chess pieces that Boss Lin had laid out.

But in truth, there was still the Church of the Dome that was at the heart of it all.

And the Church of the Dome’s Father Vincent’s contact with the bookstore had occurred way earlier than when personnel from the Ash Chamber of Commerce visited the bookstore.

Moreover, Boss Lin had even gotten him to head next door and seek out Claude, a disciple of the Great Radiant Knight, meaning that Secret Rite Tower was involved as well.

There was also Rolle Resource Development that inexplicably put up its sign right in front of the bookstore.

In ways beyond what Cherry and Wilde could see, Mr. Lin had many, many more customers...

Cherry felt a little lost. The gulf between her and Boss Lin was widening.

Each time she felt like she was making progress, things she learned later on would tell her that she was still greatly inadequate and

merely one of the many pawns of Boss Lin.

Wilde, on the other hand, was in a feverish state, pacing up and down excitedly. "It's only to be expected of Boss Lin. I've fully heard his gospel! This is the vision of a wise man, a lord and savior, an all-knowing master!"

Everything about this might seem coincidental, yet there were clear signs that each of this was a meticulously designed move of a perfect chess game!

Perhaps some people might think that the devastating power to move mountains and earth was a mark of a true powerhouse.

However, Wilde reckoned that such presence of mind and ability to make small yet precise calculations was truly unparalleled might.

Was there anyone who could casually string along the respective fates of others and with a gentle push cause every single card to fall into place?

It could be described as organized, though somewhat strange, but Wilde felt that it was like Boss Lin arranging his room, putting everyone in their appropriate place and making them do what they should do in a most organized fashion.

"This is truly the might that only a god can possess!"

Wilde had already inwardly shouted out the praises of Boss Lin many times over.

Then he thought, *perhaps, Gall... Did Boss Lin foresee that too?*

Yes, Boss Lin knows the deep sentiments regarding my two disciples, one who died unexpectedly and the other who betrayed me. And thus, he must be giving me this chance for a do-over.

Haa... As ever, Boss Lin really cares for his customers.

As Wilde was deeply moved, he looked towards the other bookstore patron, Cherry, who was pensively in thought at the moment.

“Cherry Chapman?” asked Wilde.

“Yes.” Cherry nodded. “You can just call me Cherry.”

Wilde fished out a bone whistle from the pocket of his black robes and handed it over.

Cherry took it hurriedly, then hesitantly asked, “What is this?”

“Think of it as a greeting to commemorate our first cooperation as fellow bookstore customers,” Wilde said.

He smiled, thinking that he was a part of Boss Lin’s plans and his work hadn’t been in vain. Being able to serve Boss Lin was an honor for people like them.

Cherry scrutinized it carefully but was unable to make out what sort of sorcery tool it was. Wilde then explained, “By blowing this whistle, you will be able to summon Grady regardless of wherever you are.”

Wilde reached out and stroked the back of Grady’s neck. Grady closed its eyes and gave a woof of delight, no different from any other ordinary dog.

Had it not been for what Cherry had witnessed, she wouldn’t have believed that such a lovely little pet was a monstrosity of massive proportions.

Summon it?

Search for the original.

That’s equivalent to summoning a Destructive-rank helper!

“Thank you very much for your gift.” Cherry clutched the bone whistle tightly, knowing that this was a gesture of Wilde’s kindness.

Bookstore customers were bound to meet sooner or later. And with a common connection, it was naturally easier for them to develop relations.

But at the same time, vigilance had to be maintained, for as long as people were involved, groups were bound to be formed.

There might be strangers or ones they didn't know among customers, just as well as there could be adversaries or rivals.

For example, Wilde and Joseph, the Ash Chamber of Commerce and Rolle Resource Development.

But for those without any animosity, it was possible to lean on each other...

Whoever makes the first move wins!

Cherry looked up and said, "In return, let me know if there are materials you require. As a branch deputy head of the Ash Chamber of Commerce, I will give you anything you need if the Ash Chamber of Commerce possesses it."

The value of such a Destructive-rank was un-measurable, and Cherry was willing to use all means to win him over.

We are hosted novel, find us on google.

Wilde chuckled. "Giving is unnecessary. I don't lack funds, but it would be a lie to say that I'm not short of resources. As a magician, there are many areas that require lots of experiments and the loss of materials is inevitable.

"I can buy the materials at market price if you can provide them."

Wilde continued on, "Perhaps there might be a time in future where I require more of your help. Hopefully, I'll be able to hear news of Cherry Chapman becoming a branch head of the Ash Chamber of Commerce in the near future."

Cherry returned the smile, which presented that their preliminary cooperation had begun.

As long as there are mutual interests, alliances are easily achieved.

Moreover, the two of them shared a firm bond as fellow bookstore

customers and believed that everything, including this collaboration, had all been arranged by Boss Lin.

“Achoo!”

Lin Jie sneezed in his seat.

Feeling a little chilly, he got Mu'en to close the door.

“The weather's been a little cold lately. How time flies. Looks like it's going to be winter in Norzin soon,” sighed Lin Jie.

Joseph, who had almost been shut out of the bookstore by Mu'en, used his hand to hold the door and squeeze in with a startled look on his face.

Just a moment earlier, he had been wondering how an all-powerful being like Boss Lin could sneeze.

This was something totally impossible, yet it had just occurred.

Then, hearing the following words made him come to a realization.

Based on his experience, Boss Lin's unusual action must mean something.

Boss Lin is using this as a pretext to emphasize a deeper meaning to the latter part of his sentence, 'cold Norzin winter.'

Winter is a harsh season, and it is coming to Norzin soon. This means the prelude to some slaughter, and when taking the recent matters into consideration, it means that the Church of the Dome will be facing imminent disaster.

So Boss Lin's intent is to ask us whether we can start to act?

“Joseph?” Boss Lin looked up, slightly puzzled. “Why are you still standing there in a daze?”

“Afraid I've set up a trap for you here?”

Joseph jolted. *A trap?*

Chapter 198: Reading Changes Destinies

Chapter 198: Reading Changes Destinies

A trap?

Joseph was stunned. This was basically a clear indication.

The meaning behind Boss Lin's words was probably to remind them that although it was the time to act, they shouldn't let their guard down because there were hidden traps waiting for them ahead.

Originally, Joseph and the rest were sure of certain victory and hence weren't overly cautious of the Church of the Dome.

After all, their recent operations had been very successful. The Sun's Faith was like a spark that wasn't powerful but had a shocking appeal that gradually grew into a raging fire.

After swaying the public opinion and going on the offensive, the Church of the Dome tripped over their own feet in panic. The upper echelons who had closed themselves off for no reason coupled with the exposure of many hidden scandals over the years had resulted in great internal pressure on the verge of erupting.

It could be said that the Church of the Dome was in a state of turmoil and unrest.

Recently, the church had made a bad move. Some fanatics from certain parishes were instigated by the Third Apostle to lobby in the streets. It was only intended as opposing preaching to get those whose faith had wavered to return to the Moon's embrace.

Unexpectedly, while these fanatics were out lobbying in the streets, so too were those wavering followers who wanted an explanation from the Church of the Dome. Intense words were exchanged and a confrontation between the two groups occurred.

The verbal conflict turned physical and eventually led to bloodshed.

The pressure on the Church of the Dome was so great that the Third Parish's Church closed temporarily and stopped accepting prayers and confessions from followers, as well as interviews and inquiries from people on the outside.

However, the crux was the assassination of the Third Apostle, who was a headless corpse by the time he was found.

This, of course, was all part of Vincent's scheme. Enhanced by the sun, Athena, a female warrior hailing from an ancient tribe, had executed the killing, and though her methods were a little crude, the results were effective.

The believers of the Third Parish were simply dumbfounded, and the Church of the Dome's stance of avoiding unsettled their followers, splitting the two factions. As a result, an entire parish fell apart.

The situation in the other parishes were just as bad, just that there were still apostles in place.

On the other hand, the Sun's Faith grew as rampant as weeds, with followers multiplying rapidly. Believers of the Church of the Dome, who were lost in this confusing period, were absorbed into the Sun's Faith.

This was because one of Vincent's key teachings was the "Sun and Moon having the same source" theory, which preached that the power of the moon and the power of the sun were one and the same. So if anyone believed in the moon, they could also believe in the sun.

This was basically the perfect excuse to openly poach followers.

He had yet to say that the power of the moon was actually from the sun, but followers with some degree of educational background could fill it in on their own and would believe it without any doubts as believers had witnessed the Sun's Faith displaying both the

power of the moon and the sun.

Vincent didn't mention his apostasy either. If someone brought it up, he would just smile and keep his silence, leaving the other party to imagine the truth.

Also, since the power of the moon demonstrated by Mu'en was of a higher level, one by one believers began to speculate that Vincent's so-called "apostasy" was actually an internal plot hatched by the Church of the Dome.

Despite the Church of the Dome's clergy having done some bad things, there were some good followers that remained faithful when they found out all about this, and in order to preserve their hope and belief in the true moon, they sent Vincent away for that reason.

Now that conflicts broke out and the new faith was finally established, the original Church of the Dome was just like an empty shell. And now, it just so happened that the remnants of belief these supporters had in their hearts coincided with the new faith!

They were willing to believe that the Church of the Dome was just being reborn in this way and weren't actually concealing the corruption just like they saw it!

Of course, what played the key role here was Vincent's image of being a good man.

With the evidence that Cherry brought to Claude, once it was made public, the Church of the Dome would surely fall without any chance of a comeback regardless.

But now, Boss Lin's words alerted Joseph.

Don't let your guard down!

The Church of the Dome was about to make its second sacrifice, and they were also preparing for their final offensive. It was likely that they were now deliberately showing their weakness while actually concentrating their efforts on setting a huge trap waiting for them.

_ Support us at hosted novel _

Given the power of the Church of the Dome, the entire edifice shouldn't have been falling so quickly, and any effort on their part to control the situation would have made it much tougher for Vincent's faction.

But the Church of the Dome had opted for languid actions to create the illusion of incompetence.

This meant that they were likely staking it all on one roll of the dice and placing their all on the day of the sacrifice, so these losses basically meant nothing now...

Engaging with the Church of the Dome with this current mindset would inevitably lead to negligence and taking the enemy lightly.

Joseph felt as if he had been doused with a bucket of cold water as he was taught yet another lesson.

_ Support us at hosted novel _

He couldn't help but lament. *I really gain something new each time I visit the bookstore, whether in terms of power or whatsoever!*

This is only to be expected of Boss Lin!

He walked into the middle of the bookstore and sat at the counter with an enlightened look on his face.

"If it's a trap of Boss Lin's, I'll gladly endure it."

"..." Lin Jie got goosebumps all over as he sensed the 'tenderness' in the way Joseph looked at him.

Don't tell me this uncle has reached his empty nester phase as well? Perhaps after falling out with Wilde for two years, he can no longer contain his loneliness... And is trying to find a new close friend again.

He was very much a normal, overbearing man when he first came to the bookstore but is now showing his true nature.

According to Mu'en, Claude was constantly grumbling that his extra work was all dumped on him by Joseph and he had to work

overtime every day. He was still an upright and kind knight a few years ago, but now swindling funds had become a habit since and he too was a crafty fox now.

All of it was thanks to his teacher's good example.

But deep down, Lin Jie really wanted to say that while *a teacher leads the way, the practice still depends on the individual...*

Lin Jie's gaze was suddenly drawn to Joseph's hand. The last time he went back, this arm had been empty, but now it was newly 'regrown.' It was no longer a mechanical arm but an imitation prosthetic that didn't look that much different from a normal one.

"Your new arm looks great."

Joseph chuckled and clenched his fist, declaring, "It's all thanks to Lady Moon!"

He now followed those believers in calling Mu'en "Lady Moon." After the previous battle had ended, Mu'en had directly used the Moon's power to restore his arm and this made Joseph very grateful.

Huh?

What does this have to do with Mu'en?

Lin Jie was stumped by this remark.

He then recalled that young student Mu'en's had an abnormal learning ability that was constantly developing during this period of time.

She couldn't have unlocked some sort of biology skill tree, could she?

Although this had nothing to do with him, it didn't stop him from hawking his bookstore wares either.

With a dry smile, Lin Jie said, "That is how knowledge changes destinies, so to speak. That child just listened to me and read more books in order to get to this level.

“Speaking of, I feel that you have to read more books at the current stage you are at. I have a feeling that you came to get another book this time, am I right?”

Chapter 199: Awaken The Giant Within

Chapter 199: Awaken The Giant Within

Obviously, Lin Jie didn't know if Joseph was actually here to purchase a book.

Truth to be told, Mu'en had reported to him that the situation of Vincent's group against the Church of the Dome had reached a tipping point. Both sides were anticipating conflict, and tensions were at an all time high. While one side was getting ready for a final attack, the other was preparing a last ceremony.

In such a critical moment, Joseph basically has no reason to visit him for a book purchase. He most likely would be here for detailed information regarding Michael and the Path of the Flaming Sword.

But all of us here are already thick as thieves, how can you bear to only speak official business the moment you step into my store?

Is our friendship really that shallow?

Did our many heartfelt encounters not even amount to even the price of a book?

Therefore, before we speak official business, let's have a cordial transaction to strengthen our friendship!

That's right, Lin Jie was seizing the opportunity at hand. He once again began utilizing his eloquence to promote his books.

Even if Joseph had come without the intention of buying any books, hearing such a question would make him embarrassed to state the purpose of the visit and would only speak of it after getting a book.

However, this technique was specially used to target those more acquainted patrons, especially those who were in need of help.

Time and time again, this conveniently appropriate method produced results that spoke for itself.

If this were any ordinary customer, this question would have been no different from a harmless query about their visit to the bookstore.

Unsurprisingly, Joseph was momentarily stumped by this question. He recovered quickly and nodded. "I have indeed come to get a book. Although the previous book you previously picked for me was great, the contents are rather profound.

"I must say that my comprehension skills couldn't quite keep up. Hence, I believe I still require more improvement before I can fully utilize it."

The first book he had gotten was very amazing in terms of auxiliary combat but wasn't that effective at raising Joseph's own prowess, whereas the second book he got consumed too much aether and was way too unpredictable as well.

Previously, summoning the yellow-robed figure had instantly drained all of the aether in Joseph's body and that had also been with the sacrifice of a part of Zuikaku's own summoning. Under normal circumstances, pulling off such a move would leave him unable to go on fighting.

Both books couldn't be utilized under most conventional circumstances... and it was truly a pity.

Now that he was working his way to the top and gained newfound confidence, Joseph had a clear target—to reach Supreme-rank!

Boss Lin is already aware, of course... but there's no need to be in awe. It happens all the time.

Joseph suddenly recalled Boss Lin asking Mu'en to close the bookstore door just as he was about to enter.

He now understood that Boss Lin was already awaiting his arrival and was merely teasing him intentionally.

Despite being unable to read Joseph's inner thoughts, Lin Jie was rather pleased with himself.

Look at this uncle, all flustered now.

You came with official business to discuss, but you can't bring it up directly, going along with my lead as we diverge to talk about books and now even over-explaining matters to convince yourself heh.

Although it wasn't very ethical, Lin Jie couldn't help it as he squinted his eyes into little slits as he revealed the devious grin at the thought of this 'profiteering.'

"Ahem."

Lin Jie controlled himself and resumed a serious tone, "Having this form of self-awareness is a good sign, but you have to come often in the future. After all, people never cease learning as long as they are living.

"My collection of books is by no means minuscule, so ask and you shall receive. If you ever find yourself at an impasse, you're more than welcome to visit the bookstore and seek me out."

Lin Jie did indeed play up the reputation of his bookstore, but he did have all the literature on Earth here among his books and hence it wasn't really such an exaggeration.

Joseph replied from the bottom of his heart, "You are too modest, Mr. Lin. Your bookstore consists of collections I cannot even begin to dream of."

This uncle really knows how to give compliments... Lin Jie thought to himself with a sense of satisfaction.

With a smirk, Lin Jie took up his usual pose of resting his hand atop his crossed hands. "At this stage where you are currently at, utilizing conventional methods to improve yourself wouldn't provide much evident results, especially in terms of physical strength.

"As such, I would highly recommend you to dig deep within

yourself to draw on your inner potential.”

Lin Jie retrieved a book titled ***Awaken the Giant Within*** from the bookshelf beside him.

The author of this book was Anthony Robbins, a man whose main profession was a motivational speaker. He was given many titles: ‘The World’s Master Aptitude Booster,’ ‘The Planet’s Top Success Tutor,’ ‘The Master who Unlocked Potentials Worldwide,’ and many more... In any case, he was said to be a master of his craft.

He gave both consultations and motivational coaching to presidents, leaders as well as celebrities all around the globe. Furthermore, he even provided ‘Motivational Training’ services to the US army.

Turning giving speeches into a viable profession as well as living off of it was no easy feat. One could only imagine the silver tongue he possessed to pull this off. Moreover, his accomplishments shared many similarities to what Lin Jie was currently doing...

Simply put, both of them were simply just duping. Duping others through scientific, constitutional, and conceptual basis.

When reading this book, most people would feel as if it was all a heap of logical chicken soup for the soul. However, if it really had the ability to make people perform just like the literal tonic he had written and made them wholly believe they could do so, then that would be terrifying.

All in all, being able to reach such a level in that field meant that Robbins must have had a few tricks up his sleeves. And now, Lin Jie was using him to dupe Uncle Joseph.

“A human’s potential actually just exists within the limitless creativity behind oneself. In their soul and willpower, not their physique.

“I can discern that you must have poured a substantial amount of effort into training your physique and it was indeed beneficial.

“However, at present, you find yourself unable to make a

breakthrough and hence should begin to look inwards and seek your inner self.”

After all, at the advanced age you are at, even Schwarzenegger would have put on some weight...

Although formerly a cop, Joseph has already retired sometime back and ought to be using this time for self-cultivation. Perhaps, he could even learn from Schwarzenegger and try dipping his toes in politics.

Lin Jie passed the book over to Joseph and doled out his chicken soup, “In life, there should only be two goals to concern oneself with: Avoiding suffering and pursuing happiness.

“Once this episode is over, I suggest that you, Joseph, should start considering the direction you want to take. Perhaps once you have made up your mind, you will be able to awaken the giant within and climb to the next level.”

As for the direction to think about... Insightful life mentor Lin Jie would temporarily leave the description vague.

Find the original at **hosted** novel.

Seeing Joseph with a face full of shock and dawned in realization, he grinned. *The deal has been sealed.*

Whether he made a sale was of no concern to him. What truly mattered was that at a time where Joseph was showing a tendency of being an empty nester and was heading in the wrong direction, Lin Jie had implied that reading books could help improve his life.

Joseph’s mouth felt parched as his heart palpitated. The last time he experienced such a similar feeling was all the way back when he first discovered he had qualifications to become a knight.

The title of the book was ***Virtual Soul Domain***. The contents within were fantastical, like the grand doors leading to an unfamiliar world slowly opening before Joseph.

Find the original at **hosted** novel.

This was a training style he had never seen before, and everything he had previously known was subverted. It was using one's spirit to cultivate aether, utilizing imagination to unlock one's hidden potential. By multiplying the process countless times, he could construct an enormous fortress within his soul as a foundation to build his power on.

Was this not comparable to the power level of a Supreme-rank?

Chapter 200: Knowledge

Chapter 200: Knowledge

Joseph was intoxicated by the contents of the book.

All its information came flooding in and filled his thoughts the moment he set eyes on each word.

There wasn't any need to think, nor any need to acquire this knowledge. There was absolutely no laborious work, just passively and constantly accepting this inflow of knowledge.

This was an incredibly pleasant feeling.

Joseph's consciousness levels of thinking and his soul felt as if it were gradually filled and expanded.

It was as if his strength was expanding infinitely, yet being under control, and everything could be easily understood.

However, Joseph was determined not to let himself be befuddled by this sense of perception.

He snapped out of it and looked away at once. As soon as he did so, the inculcation of knowledge ended.

At this moment, he sorted out his thoughts a little, realizing that the power of 'Virtual Soul Realm' wasn't purely about the spiritual. It firstly created a domain named 'soul realm' which constructed new laws within it.

Then, using imagination to unlock potential, countless powerful 'virtual images' could be condensed and used for battle.

However, once the other party saw through the laws of this Soul Realm, or if there was insufficient power to sustain the Soul Realm, the virtual images would collapse and fail in an instant.

But since it had power multiplied hundreds or even thousands of

times, this power was able to end the battle in a short period of time.

And the length of time in this Soul Realm still depended on the aether within his own body.

Joseph faintly felt that this was the threshold between the Destructive-rank and the Supreme-rank—"laws"!

Mastering 'laws' was the only way to attain Supreme-rank!

For example, the Supreme-rank God of Rain had mastery over the 'laws' of thunder and lightning. The pope of the Church of the Dome was directly granted authority by the "gods." However, it too was a power composed of 'laws.'

Joseph understood what Boss Lin had given him this time was a key that could unlock that particular door!

At the same time, his thoughts became clear. The knowledge in these books had never been waiting for people to learn them. Instead, they were given out according to one's own initiative.

Just as Boss Lin had said before: "When you read a book, the book is also looking at you."

All this knowledge was 'alive'!

When this knowledge flowed into the mind, it was as if new blood had been injected into the body. It becomes so active instantly that one would assume it had been lying dormant in a certain corner and just waiting to occupy everything.

On the other side, Lin Jie's face was almost stiff from maintaining that inscrutable smile as he watched Joseph seemingly obsessed with the book. Feeling that the elder shouldn't be disturbed, he got up to pour some water for himself.

Mu'en had been standing at the side all this while. She attempted to pour water when she saw Lin Jie's movement, but the boss put out a hand to stop her and gave a smile to signal that he could do it on his own.

_ Support us at hosted novel _

After all, Mu'en had been rather busy lately. She was doing a good job with the book cafe next door as well as assisting Vincent in making plans to deal with the Church of the Dome.

She was a capable girl that excelled in both housework and social life, and Lin Jie felt bad to have her wait on him like this.

Ahem...

Moreover, the book cafe had made more money over these few days than the sum of his bookstore earnings over the years. Even if it was a place for the gathering of believers, they still had to charge for tea!

Such a capable assistant had to be treated well.

Lin Jie came back with a glass of water and found that Joseph was still staring at the book in a daze.

Uh... While reading seriously is a good thing, I am afraid that there wouldn't be time to talk about official business if this goes on.

Lin Jie glanced at the sky outside, then leaned in and asked, "Joseph, how is it? Do you feel a little enlightened, or is it a bit difficult to understand?

"You mustn't force yourself as such things can't be forced. Just go with the flow, or it will be very laborious and counterproductive."

.

Lin Jie reached out and patted Joseph on the shoulder as he said all these.

Joseph instantly snapped out of his daze with beads of sweat on his forehead.

That's terrifying...

He still had a lingering fear. Everything had occurred in just a few

minutes and the entire process was rather calm, but Joseph was certain that he would have been ‘devoured’ by all that knowledge if he had gone on just a little more!

Till now, he was still unsure whether it was that knowledge or his own imagination that was ‘devouring’ him.

This knowledge... seems to be pursuing humans.

Indeed, the stronger the power, the more dangerous it was.

Especially so for the books from Boss Lin.

Without Boss Lin’s timely reminder, Joseph would have died!

Joseph nodded quickly and said, “You’re right, I was a little impatient and should have been more prudent. Such things need to be done gradually.”

Lin Jie nodded and said, “Yes, you are right. Don’t be too reckless. So, this book...”

Joseph immediately understood his intention. “I’ll take it!”

Lin Jie’s smile brightened as he took the book over and packaged it adeptly.

He collected the money in one hand and delivered it with the other while instructing, “Don’t be too reliant on all that is said in this book. You must have your own mind as well, for following blindly can lead to a dead end.”

Joseph nodded to indicate that he would keep Boss Lin’s teachings in mind.

Having talked for quite a long time, Lin Jie finally recalled the ‘official business’ that Joseph intended to discuss with him. Joseph was agreeing with Lin Jie the entire time and it seemed that the old man wouldn’t mention it if Lin Jie didn’t bring it up.

Thus, Lin Jie cleared his throat and asked, “Anyway, how is the situation with you guys? Has preparation been well?”

Joseph naturally reported the entire situation to Boss Lin.

Next up, they would publish the crucial evidence that Cherry had obtained and reveal the fact that the Church of the Dome had used Holy Moon Essence to subjugate the congregation.

Following that would be a siege on the Central Chapel of the Church of the Dome.

Lin Jie nodded and decided to give some subtle hints, “You guys just have to do your best. As for that Gabriel fellow, I don’t think he’s that much of a big threat, so don’t worry.”

Joseph and the others needed to be assured first. Though Lin Jie himself was uncertain, the others shouldn’t be discouraged.

As for the rest, he could only rely on himself.

After sending off Joseph, Lin Jie noticed that it was getting late and decided to close up shop.

He was going to start experimenting today and try to expand the dream realm into reality.

He had tried it many times before but they were all on a small scale. In the beginning, he could do it in the bedroom, then in the bookstore, and gradually he learned to jump into other people’s dreams and then expand his realm.

The experiment was very successful. He had found the location of the Central Chapel in the dream of a certain apostle and he was now going to try putting the entire Central Chapel into his own dream...

The process could take days, so he informed Mu’en in advance to stay away from the bedroom.

He was going into ‘seclusion.’

Volume 3

Chapter 201: False God Above The Dome

Chapter 201: False God Above The Dome

Lin Jie stood in the middle of the room.

It was the same old layout before him. The wooden floor, bookshelves, a faint musty smell of old books, and the shadow of the tree outside as sunlight passed through.

Unlike the first dream he constructed, the level of completion and finesse of the current one was a whole different level, as if it had been smoothly upgraded to 1080p and was basically no different from reality.

Additionally, there was now a sword, a stack of documented notes, and a book on the coffee table beside the sofa.

This was the result of his attempt at ‘Dream Reality Extension,’ which was also the act of putting objects from reality into a dream.

Fearing that the documents would be stolen and that the sword would be difficult to carry around, Lin Jie simply projected them all into his dream and studied them during his sleep.

After successfully constructing the frame of his dream realm, Lin Jie would not have any other dreams each time he fell asleep. Instead, he would ‘wake up’ in this dream, just like it was a save point or a safe house.

Lin Jie went downstairs, walked to the door, and opened it.

The door, which the Waning Crescent Apostle Buck had found immovable, was easily opened. However, Lin Jie wasn’t met with bright sunlight outside, nor the sight of the large sycamore tree that could be seen from the upstairs window.

Instead, he was faced with an austere white corridor.

The overall presentation of the chalk-white corridor was intricate and seemingly divine. Its ceiling was about ten meters high and the entire corridor was spacious.

Rose stained glass windows adorned the walls on both sides, along with murals, colonnades, and statues. The polished floor gave off a brilliant shine, completing a stunning scenery too hallowed to be sullied.

This was the sacred cloister of the Church of the Dome's Central Chapel, located at the bottom right corner of the whole building when viewed from a bird's eye view. The purpose of this location was purely for aesthetics. It was often used to receive noble followers when they visited to generate an unforgettable first impression.

Moving further on-wards was the main area of the Church, a lengthy hall used for worship. In addition to that, the area also included storage for various icons and relics of the pope as well as a residential area for the clergy members of the Church.

The entire church was basically shaped like a crescent moon. Furthermore, located at the tip of this crescent building was an inner room exclusive only to the pope and apostles.

This was the second dream realm that Lin Jie had created and the first node beyond his dream framework.

Of course, this area was ultimately still a dream.

Lin Jie had spent approximately two weeks carrying out all the steps ranging from entering, influencing, guiding, and occupying the dreams of other individuals.

The time spent on the first two steps was the longest. This could be owed to the fact that Lin Jie had to precisely position himself into a dream of one of the apostles. And in order to do so, he had to leap through countless dreams to pinpoint the exact connection.

However, when he lamented the difficulty of this task to Silver, the

only response he got was a look of resignation from Silver, as if she was dealing with a dumb child.

Lin Jie later had a revelation that these initial steps should have indeed been easy, yet he still spent too much time performing them.

Silver would have probably found his performance talent-less.

Fortunately, he was a disciple personally trained by Silver, hence he would still have no choice but to reluctantly accept the fact.

The latter steps which followed after were much more straightforward. Relatively, if compared to the previous two.

Because of how fragmented most dreams were, he could barely decipher any information from them. However, once he had verified the dream realm belonging to one of the apostles, he immediately marked it down.

After which, he would begin the process of guiding this dream.

For an apostle of the Church of the Dome, having the church appear in their dream wouldn't be out of the ordinary. In fact, this was frequently observed, and Lin Jie would need to guide the apostle to have this recurring dream until a complete dream realm was formed.

But for some reason, after Lin Jie had successfully isolated and occupied the dream from the apostle, that apostle's presence could no longer be detected.

This left Lin Jie baffled and unable to determine the principle behind it. However, the only goal he had in mind was for this to be successful.

Now, only one final step remained — overlapping the dream realm with reality.

Dreams were nothingness.

Regardless of how realistic dreams were, the truth remained that these all existed in an illusory place. Aether used for constructing

dreams also symbolized the sky, like the air that existed far above.

Similar to how dream-catchers are always placed above the head in order to filter out and capture the ‘floating’ nightmares.

And now, Lin Jie was about to make this dream realm descend.

All the way down to reality.

Central Chapel, inner chamber.

As per the norm, Rodney was clothed in the solemn white-gold papal robes. With his scepter in hand, he gazed upwards at the open circular skylight.

The view of the sky, full of gray clouds. Occasionally as they drifted, the hazy shape of the moon could be seen.

On an altar beneath, layers upon layers of fresh but contaminated blood were caked onto it. Even if the mess was to be absorbed by the altar, the blood-stains left behind couldn’t be wiped clean.

What remained was mottled, cloudy wisps of dark crimson, giving an illusion that they were wriggling. This was particularly eye-catching as the phenomenon was a stark contrast to the pure white altar.

Rodney had a deranged look on his face. “Soon...Very soon... and He will be able to emerge... I can feel His presence. He is preparing, He is whispering, He thirsts for his rebirth...”

In between mumbling to himself, he sometimes raised his hands in the air to give a shout. As he regained his composure after a while, a loud rumbling of a building collapsing and the clamor of a battle erupted.

At the same time, thick smoke billowed into the sky, dyeing a blood-red hue into the night sky.

The actors and the stage were all set. The curtains were finally unveiled to reveal the final performance, a decisive battle to end all battles.

For the Church of the Dome, the Sun's Faith, and Secret Rite Tower, these three parties regarded this final battle as the most crucial juncture.

All three parties had started to grow impatient regarding the unceasing skirmishes that had already persisted for a week.

"Humph, the Sun's Faith... Is this the so-called demonic god?"

"How laughable. Can an organization with a failed history and petty thieves scrounged together as members dare attempt to become gods?"

Rodney sneered, "Today, we shall show them the true meaning of despair. In the face of a true God, everything else is just a poor imitation!"

The placenta on top of the altar had begun to alter its shape and form. Blood vessels and tumorous growths were bulging, contorting and extending, enveloping the entire altar.

Underneath its silver-hued epidermis, winding blood stains began to surface. Within the placenta was a fleshy mass which squirmed and writhed restlessly. A myriad of appendages resembling arms, legs, and heads were all squeezed together as they steadily clambered outwards.

It was as if the souls of the priests who were wronged and sacrificed on this altar had all congregated within the placenta.

Additionally, seven umbilical cords had sprouted from the placenta, all of which sprawled across the entire inner chamber. At the ends of each umbilical cord were capillaries that spread out like spiderwebs.

The entire inner room looked like a slaughterhouse.

The Saintess' voice could be heard from outside the chamber as the

next batch of followers were already starting to make a ruckus. Many had begun to grow suspicious of this ritual and were preparing to escape.

Crack! Crack!

The adornments on Rodney's scepter which resembled phases of the moon began to shatter consecutively, symbolizing the death of apostles in succession.

"Ahh!"

The panicked commotion of followers trying to flee was heard beyond the door, followed by the high-pitched scream of the Saintess and a loud explosion.

Krrack——

Two interlocking concentric phases of the moon became distorted, symbolizing the demise of the Saintess.

BOOM!!!

At last, the doors to the inner chamber were blasted open. Blinding light as a result of the explosion filled the room. The surroundings outside the church were already plunged into a sea of chaos.

Flames charred every crevice of Vincent's body, causing his body to appear like a half-solidified mixture of magma and scorched earth.

Tossing the corpse of the Saintess aside, he strode forward, his two eye sockets glowing with a blazing, fiery rage.

Following behind him were Athena, Joseph, and others. Beyond them, in the sea of flames, figures could be made out engaging in combat, probably combatants from Secret Rite Tower and the Church of the Dome's clergy.

Rodney spread his arms with a smile. "Vincent, my child. Welcome ba..."

In a flash, Vincent's body became a blur as he viciously socked

Rodney in the face!

Thud!

Flames burst up as Rodney crashed into the altar.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!

Vincent proceeded to unleash a series of punches. Flames crackled from his eye sockets and sparks crackled from how hard he was grinding his teeth.

“Who! Are! You! Calling! Your! Child!”

Rodney was a Supreme-rank after all, but these hits were pummeling his brain to a pulp. Despite the dent in his head, Rodney still continued to chuckle as he looked upwards to face Vincent, who now resembled a burning man.

Sputtering, he asked, “Cough...Cough. Is this the power bestowed to you by the Demonic God you believe in?”

“Does it only amount to this?”

Vincent glared at him. “I will show you His true power.

“The power of Eternal Doom.”

Vincent clenched his fist tightly, and a searing, explosive power that seemed unrivaled materialized out of thin air.

BOOM!

“Ahhhhhhh!”

Rodney was swiftly engulfed in flames. As he continued to struggle desperately, the Moon’s divine power within his body ignited and started to implode continuously. Concurrently, it was also this same divine power that was restoring him.

Search for the original.

His Supreme-rank capabilities only served to prolong his adversity.

Only after ten whole minutes did he finally meet his fate.

Yet upon his imminent demise, Rodney's singed and unrecognizable face revealed an unsettling smile. "I...too...consumed...Holy... Moon... Essence...he-he..."

Rodney's final treacherous laughter no longer had the hoarse voice which belonged to him, but rather, these were overlapping voices of numerous individuals. Amongst one of the voices was a prominent child-like shrill.

Vincent suddenly felt countless tiny tentacles wriggling on his palm. This violating shock forced him to release his grip.

Immediately after, the bulging silvery placenta rapidly retracted its seven umbilical cords. Their movement mimicked tentacles as they snatched the corpse of Rodney away from Vincent. A gaping maw had crudely formed at the base of the placenta, which engulfed Rodney's corpse and consumed him.

As the tentacles danced around in the air, the placenta began to detach itself from the altar and started to levitate upwards.

Coincidentally, the gray clouds in the sky dissipated, and the clustering seemingly coincided with the full moon and seemed to take its place altogether.

At this point, the small party was regaining composure from the mentally scarring laughter.

But as they stared in disbelief at the sky, some of them couldn't help muttering, "What is that..."

Vincent stood up and started to retreat. He replied gravely, "Usurping the moon's authority and wearing the 'skin' of the moon as its own — this is the false god that the Church of the Dome has always believed in!"

The placenta squirmed ceaselessly. It was akin to a layer of membrane containing an 'embryo' within.

Everyone witnessing this sight could see it as clear as day. Beneath

this giant grotesque mass, a colossal eye opened up, which was nearly the size of the entire placenta.

Subsequently, via the mass intertwining of tentacles, the gradual formation of a 'face,' 'mouth,' 'head,' and 'body' appeared all over the placenta. The sky was split by the tentacles as a super-colossal beast befell, covering the entire sky and letting out an earthshaking roar.

Sucking in a deep breath, Joseph spoke, "All units standby. Form the barrier."

Chapter 202: Smite The False God

Chapter 202: Smite The False God

“All units standby. Form the barrier.

“Take note to not spread the boundary’s anchor points too far apart. This isn’t like past dream beasts. Rodney used himself to summon the ‘god’ of the Church of the Dome itself.

“It might very likely possess all of Rodney’s abilities, and perhaps be much stronger than him.

“You all have been trained on Rodney’s formations and fighting styles, right? Don’t tell me that in just two years, the Combat Division has degenerated to the point it no longer trains to deal with other factions.

“Also, send someone to inform the Council of Elders. Those old fogies should wake up and stretch their muscles once in a while.”

Am I the Combat Division’s chief or is he?! thought Gresham Winston when he heard Joseph’s swift command sound out in his year.

Joseph’s orders felt much more natural than his own...

What was more, this was met with an immediate response of cheers and roars of excitement.

Evidently, these were supporters from Joseph’s old division and die-hard loyalists. Given Joseph’s former reputation, he still had legions of fans after two years.

Is this fellow intending to come out of retirement and usurp my position?!

But Winston pursed his lips and gave out his own orders quickly, assigning everyone to their tasks and proceeded to the usual prewar

pep talk.

“Everyone, this is going to be a tough battle, but behind us is Norzin where our families, friends, and everyone we know is. Every single fight, every single swing we make is all to protect them. Falling back just one step could mean losing a smile you care about!

“I know all of you are tired of listening to words like this, but remember!

.

“If you don’t do what you are supposed to do, then such a thing can happen right away! Perhaps you might survive for some reason, but your families and friends don’t have the same strength that you possess!”

Winston drew out his sword and pointed at the tentacled moon beast in the distant sky. “That ugly thing over there,” he said, “will turn anything you care about into a fleshy pulp with just a single flick! Do you all understand!

“There is no turning back, all we can do is fight!”

After rousing up the knights and seeing the barrier light up, he switched to a private comms channel and chided.

“Joseph you ****! Are you the Combat Division chief or am I!

“What are you, an Intelligence Division personnel giving out directions here!”

Joseph and Winston were old comrades, so he wasn’t upset being chided. Laughing heartily, he said, “I just wanted to reminisce a bit. Don’t worry.

“I wouldn’t steal your position even if I regained my former strength. The Intelligence Division is way more profitable than the Combat Division!”

Find the original at [*hosted*](#) novel.

Joseph had overstepped Winston's authority and speaking out like this wasn't proper, so Winston had every right to be angry.

However, Joseph understood Winston and knew that the latter's anger was actually worry that this former Combat Division Chief would 'return' which led to self-doubt.

This showed that he wasn't confident of his own position, reputation, and strength when compared to his predecessor.

But aside from his feisty temperament, this fellow was a good knight and at least more responsible than Joseph who had put himself in self-exile two years ago.

Winston momentarily choked, then muttered, "Then you should just stay and enjoy your Intelligence Division!"

"Why so serious," chuckled Joseph. "We are all knights of Secret Rite Tower, protectors of Norzin's peace. That's enough, isn't it?"

Winston fell silent, grunted, and snapped off the communications device.

He gazed into the distant burning church battlefield with a complicated mix of emotions. *Joseph... He's really regained his former strength.*

He sounds exactly like he used to.

On the other end, Joseph shut off his communications device and glanced at that silvery floating mass of a 'life-form.' Its vast body consisted of one huge eyeball and a mass of tentacles all around that covered the sky. Each of these tentacles was at least half a meter wide and constantly dancing around in combat with the knights of Secret Rite Tower.

BOOM!

The top of the Central Chapel was ripped off along with the supporting columns, and the entire domed roof came crashing

down. In the blink of an eye, all that remained was burning wreckage.

Figures around, tiny in comparison, fell without a sound, disappearing within the sea of flames.

When battling with dream beasts, humans would forever seem small and powerless. Even when giving their all, they were merely like fleeting sparks that could be easily stubbed out.

With a creepy ‘Tee-hee’ laughter, the false god destroyed and killed wantonly like an ignorant child knocking down everything and trampling on ants.

A brilliant column of fire blazed up, seized those tentacles, and yanked the massive figure downwards.

“Aooo—”

The false god shrieked as its humongous eyeball turned to gaze at the tiny figure shrouded in flame. Then, its tentacles spread out and glowed with the different afterimages of the moon phases.

Silent Domain, Heresy Trial, Silver Moon Luster, Sacred Blessing, Moon Projection, Moonlight Courtyard, Aether Tide——

These seven abilities of the seven different phases of the moon were all activated simultaneously!

Vincent experienced a heavy pressure as illusory and corrupted moonlight fell around him, turning tangible and piercing into his body. The flames surrounding him dimmed as dense currents of aether washed over him, stripping away even the scorched earth all around.

This false good had stolen the moon’s power for thousands of years, and that immense might wasn’t something the newborn sun Vincent possessed could compare with.

“Ability Deprivation.”

A delicate young girl silently appeared in midair, extending a

tender white palm then clenching it.

It was Mu'en.

A phantasm of a beautiful woman in a black dress, sitting atop a crescent moon suddenly appeared behind the young girl. She had a sad face, with downcast eyes as she let out a slight sigh.

Then, she too extended her own hand tenderly, as if guiding her own beloved child.

“Aooo Aooo—”

The false god started to panic upon seeing the phantasm of Walpurgis, struggling in a bid to flee, but it was already too late.

Like lost children having found their mother, those afterimages of the moon phases streamed towards Walpurgis' outstretched palm with a 'swish,' forming a small, complete moon.

The false god was momentarily dumbfounded before it shrieked once more as it tried to run. However, it realized it was caught in place and looked downwards to see the man shrouded in flames.

Vincent's eyes glowed brighter as he gave a forceful yank, slamming the false god to the ground. Then, with his eyes blazing with light, he raised both hands up high and hollered, “Eternal—— Doom!!”

Rumble! Crackle!

Like the sound of thunder crashing, a bright light broke through the dark, gloomy sky, like the sun rising and lighting up the heavens and earth.

First was a gathering of fiercely burning energy, amassing into a massive ball of fire. Then, it started its descent, rapidly speeding up and creating an immense air pressure that was so powerful that the ground beneath started to crack and bits of debris to float.

The entire sky was burning!

The sun —— was crashing down!

Chapter 203: I've Been Waiting For You To Show Up

Chapter 203: I've Been Waiting For You To Show Up

Rumble...

The massive ball of fire broke through the clouds and came streaking downwards from, creating streams of airwaves all around it as it ignited the entire sky and smashed into the false god that Vincent had dragged to the ground in a blinding light.

The entire battlefield shook as if a massive earthquake was taking place.

“Aooo—”

The huge mass of countless entwined tentacles was pulverized like a jelly smashed by a rock as parts of it splattered into a bloody mix.

At the same moment, the ground was split open and a massive wave of heat and air pressure erupted from the center, causing buildings all around to crumble as debris, trees, and everything else were blown outwards, thudding hard into the barrier and creating ripples.

This was only the first blitz. Vincent, who was now in midair, grasped his hands together and did a downward pulling motion.

BOOM!

The sun-like ball of fire sank further, melting everything within range with its wind and flames. The ground turned to magma and water vapor in the air started to sizzle as the entire fire ball started to disintegrate.

A black speck appeared at the core of the flaming sphere and gradually spread out like mildew. The ball of fire started to shrink

inwards, turning into a chaotic fusion of black and red. Eventually, the fire ball reached a size that was a third of its original.

The ground, now barren, had sunk approximately hundred meters, forming a massive crater with the spaces around it all twisted.

Vincent's veins were bulging as sweat poured down his forehead. It was evident that he had compressed the ball of fire as much as he could bear for now.

He sucked in a deep breath, released his hands and backed away rapidly.

The black-and-red ball of fire instantly detonated from its core, and a circular shock-wave expanded. A column of fire shot upward into the skies and at the same time, downwards at the false god below.

As the ground shook, a huge crack tore open the earth, revealing the artificial foundations beneath Norzin. Clearly, after penetrating the false god, the column of fire had continued on much deeper into the ground.

“Screech!!!”

A shrill shriek unbearable to the human ear sounded as the entire eyeball was pierced by the explosion. The false god's outer skin was torched with burn marks as a turbid yellow acid splashed out. However, its inner organs and viscera still retained some vitality.

Squelch!

The visceral-like flesh started to regenerate rapidly as blood gushed out like a waterfall, spawning slender tentacles that were like a thin moon ribbon that pierced the exhausted Vincent and pinned him to the ground.

The mutilated eyeball tissue turned into countless newborn eyes, whirling and blinking in an extremely unsettling manner.

However, this was its final death throes. The pillar of flame continued to hurt it and these tiny eyes combusted in succession, spraying yellow pus everywhere as its tentacles withered up

rapidly.

The false god squirmed in a final rage-fueled attack, raising its tentacles high up in a bid to kill this mortal enemy.

A golden sword flashed across, creating an air wave that cut through the false god's tentacled body and split it into half.

Eventually, the fine golden light stopped in its tracks, forming a cross with that fire column shooting into the sky, nailing the false god in its place.

The false god's movements ceased and its eyes became glazed as its remaining tentacles went limp and fell to the ground.

The last thing it saw was the image of a burly old man with a sword held high. His snow white hair was a stark contrast to his large, robust body cloaked in stimulated aether like a white flame that couldn't be extinguished.

The Indomitable Sacred Flame, Joseph.

The survivors of Secret Rite Tower that had already retreated to the periphery of the massive battle gazed up at the figure in midair and murmured his name.

He held no demon sword in his hand, but his soul wielded an even sharper blade.

Rumble...

We are hosted novel, find us on google.

The pillar of flame went out, and the sword marks vanished. Finally, the false god fell to the ground.

Joseph gazed at the lifeless mass for some time, not daring to relax. Finally, he heaved a sigh of relief and withdrew his aether.

This one strike had drained his strength.

A Supreme-rank, even at the verge of death, was still a hundred

times stronger than a Destructive-rank. Slaying one with a single strike required everything he had.

Fortunately... everything had ended.

Joseph landed by Vincent's side, staggering slightly. He raised a hand out to help Vincent up and asked, "Are you alright?"

Vincent had already returned back to his normal form, but his eyes were still empty sockets and his chest and stomach were entirely ripped. He coughed a couple of times, forcing a smile and reached out. "I'm alright... We won."

Vincent grabbed his hand and squeezed it. "Yes, we won," he sighed.

Clap clap clap...

Abrupt applause rang out over the silent battlefield.

Vincent and Joseph turned to the source of sound at the same time and their eyes narrowed. As the dust settled, a handsome youth with silver eyes floated in the air with a bright smile.

"A marvelous performance. Congratulations on your victory over a Supreme-rank enemy... even though it was only a sham."

The smiling young man in long, black robes with the motif of a flaming sword met the gaze of the two men. "Indeed, my guess was right. The real moon didn't die and only created true divinity in dreams. That is why the Primordial Witches have been unanimously hiding in the dream realm...

"Isn't that right, Lady Walpurgis who controls the night?"

The silver-haired youth looked towards the young maiden floating in the distance as well as the female phantasm behind her. Formless aetheric spears had already encircled and trapped the two of them.

Walpurgis stared at him with deep scrutiny. "I remember you."

"I'm really honored that you actually remembered me." The silver-

haired youth gave a slight bow. “Perhaps, I should introduce myself. I was the first pope of the Church of the Dome and go by the name ‘Gabriel’ now.

“Perhaps you don’t know,” Gabriel licked his lips with a crazy glint in his eyes. “This beast was merely an idle and foolish little thing originally. It was me who encouraged it, told it that there was a beautiful dress in the west of the dream realm. It then went there, tore off the skin of the moon and put it on itself and caged up the original.

“It was me. I created a god!” said Gabriel, his face drunken with glee.

“I never imagined being able to see a great entity like yourself, one so kind and forgiving. I sincerely hope you can fulfill my wish to let me use the same method... and become a god!”

Gabriel grinned. “All my efforts to find your whereabouts, your arrival, and planning for so long didn’t go to waste.”

As the dust on the ground cleared, the vague illusory outlines of a silvery array was revealed to be forming above the scorched earth.

Evidently, he had used the power of the Church of the Dome to set up a powerful array here.

Joseph and Vincent paled and even Walpurgis’ face sank. Mu’en bit her lips and started to approximate whether she could escape with her current strength.

But as the array was solidifying, a faint voice echoed, “I’ve been waiting for you to show up.”

Though dull, this voice seemed to thunder across the sky as if it came from the high heavens.

Gabriel and everyone else looked upwards at once to see a huge dark shadowy figure looming in the sky where the clouds had cleared.

The black silhouette was so large that even the sky seemed unable

to contain it. It was as if this entity was a giant overlooking a chessboard with only its head, neck, and shoulders visible. The rest of this entity was obscured by the vastness of the starry skies behind it.

The black figure extended a hand, thrusting through the clouds and grabbed Gabriel.

Clink Clang!

Search for the original.

A tinkling of what sounded like glass shattering rang out and the entire world seemed to fall apart. The barren earth, burning ruins, dark sky, and the false god's body turned into fragmented pieces.

Everyone's vision was blinded momentarily only to find themselves still within the Central Chapel.

“What's going on?!”

Joseph stood up with a start and surveyed his surroundings warily, discovering he was still in the Chapel's inner chamber. In front of him was the altar with the silvery placenta on it all shriveled up while Rodney's burnt corpse laid at the side.

However, the surrounding walls and constructs were undamaged and tranquil moonlight shone through the circular window above.

At this moment, Joseph had only one thought in mind—

That voice... doesn't it sound like Boss Lin?

Chapter 204: From Today On, The Church Of The Dome No Longer Exists In Norzin

Chapter 204: From Today On, The Church of The Dome No Longer Exists In Norzin

Was that Boss Lin's voice?!

Does this mean... that gigantic shadowy figure which reached out and immediately crushed Gabriel was Boss Lin?!

From what Joseph recalled, that fuzzy black shadow had grabbed and incapacitate Gabriel with a single hand. Gabriel going from blatant complacency, to panic, fury, then utter despair in that short moment was an image that he couldn't get out of his mind.

But what is happening now?

A growing commotion had started, disrupting the peaceful quiet. Joseph could make out several familiar voices belonging to the knights of Secret Rite Tower. Just like himself, they too were unable to decipher the situation and wore confused looks.

Snapping out of his daze, Joseph noticed Rodney's charred corpse and the shriveled placenta resting on top of the altar. *Are they... both dead?*

He decided to reach out and inspect, yet, as he did so, he staggered and his whole body crashed to the ground.

It was only then did he realize his complete exhaustion. His body felt empty inside, as if someone had squeezed all the life out of him. At the same time, an intense pain tore through his entire frame.

Joseph was familiar with this sensation. This exactly mirrored the previous situation where he had consumed all his aether,

unleashing the secret technique which hit the limits of his body and causing it to break down.

Meanwhile, the feeling of disconnect similar to having just awakened from a dream was slowly receding.

As Joseph calmed down, he felt more clear-headed.

Was everything that happened all a dream?

Yet Rodney and the false god were definitely dead, and his exhausted condition was also very apparent. This meant that all these events had undeniably happened.

With his vast experience amassed from years of combat against dream beasts, Joseph reckoned that he had likely entered the rift between dreams and reality, where happenings of the dream realm were directly reflected onto reality itself.

As such, both Rodney and the false god perished, while he too had landed the final blow. However, because everything had happened in the dream realm, the damage only affected his body whereas the surrounding buildings and terrain didn't receive any damage.

At this point, Joseph immediately looked to the side. As expected, his eyes met an unconscious Vincent lying there, with blood still oozing from his chest where the false god had pierced him.

Also, a lunar glow still shrouded Mu'en's body, thread-like moonlight wrapping around her as if slowly turning her into a cocoon and making her flesh and skin appear translucent.

"Logistics! Any personnel from the Logistics Branch? Come over here and help!"

Joseph shouted out loudly for the people outside. The communications device that was originally equipped had been fragmented by aether. And since his own aether reserves were also running low, he could only rely on his voice.

Although the knights outside were also perplexed by the current situation, they were at least properly trained with their procedures.

Despite being clueless, they knew to do what was expected of them.

The magicians responsible for first-aid in the Logistics Branch quickly rushed on scene and began performing treatment on Vincent at once.

Taking the time to recover strength, Joseph inquired about the situation outside. Just as he had anticipated, those who were affected in the dream realm had their plight reflected onto their bodies in reality.

At this moment, the whole Central Chapel seemed to be awakening from a bizarre dream. Those who failed to make it out alive looked like they had been ravaged and crushed a thousand times over, and their remains made for gruesome sights. However, the surrounding infrastructure remained untouched and intact.

Was that Mr. Lin's dream domain?

Joseph headed out and gazed at the serene moon in the sky above.

Personnel from Secret Rite Tower that were situated within the church grounds were having intense conversations with those that had been situated outside and there was an air of disbelief among all.

"How can this be? We were only inside for five minutes?!" exclaimed Combat Division Chief Winston with a face covered in cold sweat.

"Definitely only five minutes has passed. We'd only just contacted the Council of Elders after erecting the external barrier and you guys were already out... I'm still waiting to know what happened in the Church!

"We would have already gone in as backup if there was a lack of response for an extended period of time."

The person in charge of sending in reinforcements was from the Logistics Division. Right now, all he could do was simply point at the glowing barrier all around and give a light shrug.

“Wait a moment, I am certain we only gave the command to set up the barrier and inform the Council of Elders quite a while after the battle commenced. Could it be that time flowed differently on both sides? But the communicators were still connected...”

“Yeah, it did seem somewhat strange at that time, but because the order issued was according to standard protocol, combined with the short time frame, we didn’t give it any second thought.”

Then, with a complicated look on his face, the Logistics Division personnel in charge continued, “Never did I imagine the battle to conclude moments after the order was given...”

Noticing Winston’s face of bewilderment, Joseph simply walked up to him and gave a pat on his shoulder. “Don’t stress yourself out, what just happened was Boss Lin. He came here to help us.”

Winston was astonished. “The very same bookstore owner you made contact with?”

Joseph nodded and sighed deeply. “I paid a visit to Boss Lin just before the battle and he specifically reminded me of a ‘trap.’ However... he also added that we lacked sufficient strength so even if we knew, the battle with the false god would exhaust all our strength, leaving us with no way of continuing to battle.

“Boss Lin already foresaw this issue and later told me that ‘we just needed to do our best and he would handle the rest.’ And as expected, he showed up when we were all depleted.”

Patting Winston’s shoulder once again, Joseph continued, “As long as Boss Lin is around, that ‘Gabriel’ is probably resting in pieces by now.

“The battle is over.”

Joseph glanced at the church behind him.

God knew how many followers and priests had been lured and disposed of by this church which had stood in Norzin for ages.

Yet, all that remained now was an empty wasteland, littered with

ruins.

“From today on, the Church of the Dome no longer exists in Norzin.”

Winston was still in disbelief. He knew a bookshop owner by the name ‘Lin Jie’ whose power level was kept confidential within the database. This information couldn’t be disclosed, which meant that he had been identified to be at the peak among Supreme-ranks.

But who would’ve thought he was actually this powerful...

In that mere five minutes, a dream realm had materialized, and a fight to the death between two Supreme-ranks had been instantaneously decided so casually.

Moreover, what was that final massive shadow that had appeared?

Recalling that sent shivers down Winston’s spine. Had it all not occurred in a dream realm, the sheer bulk of the false god of at least a thousand meters wide would have covered a great deal of the sky. Yet, it was merely the size of the figure’s palm...

They had all been like puny ants compared to the false god, but when compared to the shadowy figure, every one of them would be like mere specks of dust!

When did we actually enter the dream realm?

And not a single one of us sensed anything... including the Gabriel fellow who had set up an ambush.

What’s this!

A total crushing!

What is someone that crushes... Supreme-ranks?

It was merely early autumn, yet Winston felt ice-cold and he could barely prevent his body from shivering. Fortunately, Joseph, who had already walked off, failed to notice this.

It was only when the communications device in his hand beeped continuously did Winston recover. Upon turning it on, he discovered it was a private video call from the fourth seat elder, Solomon.

Winston immediately answered the call and a set of venerable facial features appeared. Solomon did not speak, instead he brought over an object. On it was the recording of Secret Rite Tower attacking the Central Chapel of the Church of the Dome.

Indeed as mentioned by Logistics personnel, there was total radio silence from the advance party after they rushed into the church. For a whole five minutes, there was pin-drop silence and this eerie atmosphere was only disrupted by the abrupt outcry combined with other noises.

Solomon replayed the recording, slowed it down, and paused.

On the display, the church shook and seemingly produced an afterimage. Following that, a faint shadow appeared in the night sky, so large its entire frame couldn't fit into view.

Almost at once, a seemingly elliptical, vast, and endless sea of cosmos and stars manifested in the night sky.

Before the shadowy figure evanesced, it appeared to directly face the recording source for a moment.

Winston was momentarily startled, and the video also cut off at this point.

Solomon turned off the recording and asked, "Winston, do you understand what this was?"

Winston was deep in thought for a prolonged period of time before responding, "...a fissure in the dream realm."

Solomon shook his head. "This is a god's domain."

Winston's eyes narrowed. He felt as if he hit his head and was struck with a sledgehammer, leaving at a loss for thoughts and words.

Solomon then added, “We were already keeping tabs on this operation from the beginning, or rather, we’ve been monitoring it all. Never did I imagine that we were able to record this moment. I personally believe that we might have an approximate guess of the true identity of the bookstore owner.”

If not a god, then at least an emissary of one.

Winston asked tentatively, “Then... what should we do?”

“Spare no expense in investigating and seek his help... Path of the Flaming Sword is a name that hasn’t been heard in a long time.”

Joseph spent a long time searching the church before he finally spotted a suspicious lump resembling Gabriel laying in a corner.

As this was no longer a recognizable human form, Joseph could identify it as Gabriel from the iconic ‘Path of the Flaming Sword’ regalia on the clothing.

Two Supreme-ranks, one burnt to a crisp, the other dead without a corpse.

Rather tragic...

Joseph ordered for these remains and clothes to be collected... A body of a Supreme-rank still contained unimaginable power after all. Quality materials used to synthesize transcendent objects couldn’t be wasted.

When Joseph turned around, he saw Mu’en standing nearby alongside Vincent who could barely walk after his treatment.

They were both chatting and laughing about their current predicament. Vincent then asked, “Shall we visit Boss Lin together? We really ought to thank him for saving us and preventing much further collateral damage.”

Looking back at the last fight, if it had truly taken place in reality,

the barrier definitely wouldn't have been able to hold and by then, countless nearby lives of innocent citizens would have been lost.

The flooding waters previously caused by the Rain God was already bad enough. This time was a literal meteor strike, and Norzin would have required serious repairs to its foundations while Secret Rite Tower would once again have to fork up quite a bit of their funding to clear up the mess.

The dream realm created by Boss Lin prevented the monumental loss of funding and he was a true savior to them.

Mu'en hesitated slightly, but then reckoned that Boss Lin should have woken up by now. With a nod, she accompanied Joseph and Vincent to the bookstore.

The mess still remaining on scene would naturally be left for the Logistics Division to handle.

As the group neared the bookstore, they spotted a yawning Lin Jie in pajamas opening the main door. He looked up and greeted them with a smile. "Yo."

Lin Jie's eyes twitched as he caught sight of a mosquito flying by and proceeded to swat it with his palms. "There are way too many mosquitoes disrupting my sleep at night. All lives are supposed to have a purpose; shameless mosquitoes don't. It makes no difference even if they're dead."

Glancing at the three others, Lin Jie had a slightly peculiar look on his face as he said, "Speaking of which, I just had the most fascinating dream."

Chapter 205: Two Sacred Artifacts

Chapter 205: Two Sacred Artifacts

Joseph froze. From past experience, he reckoned that Boss Lin was reviewing their performance, thus, he cautiously questioned, “What kind of dream would stir the interest of you, Boss Lin?”

However, Lin Jie didn’t mention the dream he had this time. Instead, he seemed to observe the strange looks of the others and gave a mysterious smirk.

“It’s nothing much, just that it felt like this thing was somewhat special which made me change some opinions I have of you guys. Oh, nothing of the negative sort though.

“It’s rather cold outside, let’s continue the conversation inside.”

The bell jingled as the main door was fully opened. Grinning, Lin Jie allowed his assistant and the two esteemed guests to enter the store first.

It was roughly 4:30 in the early hours of the morning and the whole of Norzin was still deep in slumber.

The cyan-hued sky, which the moon still hung upon, was dotted with twinkling stars. A thin morning fog had formed on the streets, making it seem all the more quaint and serene.

This only made the overlapping creaking of the doors and the chiming of the door chimes all the more apparent in the morning breeze.

Joseph and Vincent exchanged glances, reaching a shared consensus that by opening up for the day at this time, Boss Lin must have been specifically waiting for them.

Otherwise, the bookstore would've probably been opened for business according to the usual opening hours of around 7 or 8 a.m.

Furthermore, based on Boss Lin's manner of speech, wasn't he insinuating that the conceited Gabriel who was crushed in a swift blow resembled a brainless mosquito seeking for death?

More importantly was what he said about 'having the most fascinating dream' and having 'changed some opinions about you guys.'

Both of these were rather self-explanatory and it meant that without a doubt, they had all been in Boss Lin's dream realm!

Ever since they stepped foot into the Central Chapel, everyone present within the church grounds had unknowingly entered his dream realm. Every single one of them had become the tiny 'grains of sand' overlooked by the gigantic shadowy figure... or rather, they had become 'chess pieces.'

Thinking back, the frightening image of the shadowy figure reaching out and crushing Gabriel did closely resemble a chess piece being taken out.

Everyone present had been in Boss Lin's control and he had been watching over everything. Their performance during this incident must have appeased Boss Lin for him to have an improved opinion about them.

It was also well established in historical records that besides the Primordial Witches, no one else had ever been able to enter the realms of dreams.

This was mainly because in addition to it being the harrowing abyss, powerful monsters beyond one's imagination also crawled these realms. The stronger someone was, the less they would be willing to try and enter a dream realm.

Sorcery tools like the dream catcher were prohibited objects that even Destructive-ranks didn't dare use. Entering a dream realm in person was definitely out of the question, as the aether of higher

level transcendent beings were very noticeable, which could attract a large number of such creatures in minutes, akin to moths to a flame.

If one was unlucky enough to disturb something beyond what they could handle, dying on the spot was a very likely outcome.

During the fabled Dark Ages, the tragedies caused by dreams invading reality were hair-raising stories. Even in the present day, the occasional dream beast escaping from a dream realm fissure was more than enough to cause them massive headaches.

No one in their right mind would ever want to face a horde of dream beasts numbering hundreds or thousands by themselves...

Yet now, Boss Lin wasn't just entering dream realms with no issue. He was straight up able to have one of his own. He literally had the ability to create a dream realm!

This level of strength was beyond belief!

While Joseph was already rather desensitized to Boss Lin's formidable capabilities, he had never personally experienced it before. Most of it had been exposed to the 'all-knowing' wisdom of Boss Lin.

This time, being trapped in the dream realm allowed him to directly witness a Supreme-rank transcendent being squished to death like an ant. The shock of it all had left him at a loss for words.

Taking deep breaths, he pressed his hand against his chest to calm his pounding heart. As he entered the bookstore, he suddenly recalled that there was only one seat in front of the counter—the bookstore rarely had multiple customers at once, hence there was also only a single high stool there.

As the bookstore's assistant, Mu'en routinely made her way to pour some water for everyone. Therefore, it made sense to give up the sole seat to the injured Vincent.

The priest's face was still white as a sheet. He had contributed the most in this great battle. He had suffered grave consequences in

order to finish off that Supreme-rank false god and had nearly given up his own life as a result.

Despite this, the final outcome was still a favorable one.

From this day forth, the Church of the Dome no longer existed, and the Seven Parishes would be taken over by the gradually establishing Sun's Faith.

After today's visit, Vincent would be heavily involving himself with developing the Sun's Faith.

This time, Joseph was just simply exhausted. When Gabriel had appeared, Joseph was originally preparing to use Virtual Soul Realm to engage him. Yet, it turned out that Boss Lin already had arrangements in place and had handled it, allowing Joseph to have largely recovered by now.

Noticing the recliner still tucked away in a corner, Joseph felt a sudden jolt of yearning deep down. He went over to sit in it and caressed the armrest.

Recalling his very first visit to the bookstore made Joseph break out in cold sweat. At that time, Boss Lin had only given him a minor punishment, and helping to resolve his troubles with the demon sword meant that he was actually in a good mood then.

The longer Joseph spent with Boss Lin, the more he would increasingly find the bookstore owner all the more unfathomable.

Joseph glanced at Boss Lin who was still standing outside the door. It was a rare occasion to be able to see Boss Lin in his sleepwear, giving off a more mysterious vibe than the young boss who was usually behind the counter reading.

Boss Lin's ability to disguise himself is also of utmost brilliance, thought Joseph to himself.

Lin Jie flipped over the signboard on the door and erased the previously written 'Closed for 3 days,' and changed it back to 'Open.'

Returning to seat behind the counter, he took a sip from his glass of water. "Have all your issues been resolved?"

The two men froze for a moment upon hearing this. Then, Vincent nodded and answered with a slightly downcast voice. "Yes, the Church of the Dome will no longer be continuing their sinful acts. My hatred has been quelled, it's just that we'll never be able to get back those who lost their lives when they got involved with this matter."

Whether it was Old Father Terrence or those former colleagues bewitched by Rodney and sent to their deaths, all of these lives couldn't be recovered, along with his past as a priest.

At this point, Joseph spoke up, "The Church of the Dome will forever be shrouded in shame. We will publicize all of their misdoings, including their crimes of killing innocents, making large profits of their followers, and pardoning the crimes of the rich and powerful.

"Regarding the huge wealth they had amassed, half will be confiscated, and the rest would be handed to the Sun's Faith to be used as reimbursement for this operation. The Church would also be passed on to the Sun's Faith."

Mmm... This is rather police-like.

But this large amount... Lin Jie couldn't help sneaking a glance at Vincent. Although he kept a calm expression, Lin Jie was already scheming deep down.

Yet another important customer groomed. Vincent will soon become the leader of the largest religious organization in Norzin, so shouldn't I get him to buy a few books here?

Best to develop relations with their followers too. Even if they don't come to buy books, becoming regulars of the book cafe would be great as well...

Noticing Lin Jie's expectant gaze, Vincent understood the 'hint' and proceeded to take out the relics he had found in the inner chamber.

One was a silver ring, while the other was a peculiar hard-shelled 'insect egg' roughly the size of a palm.

Find the original at **hosted** novel.

These were indeed two out of three sacred artifacts from the Church of the Dome: the Ancient Ring and the Sleeping Moon Child.

Chapter 206: Warm

Chapter 206: Warm

Vincent placed the two sacred artifacts on the counter-top. “These two are the sacred artifacts worshiped within the inner chamber of the Church of the Dome; the Ancient Ring and the Sleeping Moon Child.

“Based on old legends, the Ancient Ring was a symbol of authority of the highest ranked follower designated by the Moon.

“The Sleeping Moon Child, as its name implies, is the Moon’s offspring, the ‘sacred child’ of the Church of the Dome as well as the main material used to produce Holy Moon Essence.”

He turned towards Boss Lin with a look that implied *I believe you have interest in such objects, so I saved them specially for you.*

Vincent pushed the two objects forward and glanced at the gargoyle at the side.

Lin Jie’s lips twitched slightly as he glanced at the primitive-looking silver ring— *aka old and shabby* —and the very mysterious— *aka useless* —egg next to it.

The Church of the Dome’s sacred artifacts?

While he was a little curious about these objects related to the occult, it was a well-known fact that the artifacts belonging to faiths or religions were usually very strange. For example, the Holy Chalice in Christianity was actually a wine glass used by Jesus and his disciples, while The Shroud of Turin or Holy Shroud was supposedly a burial garment of Christ...

Thus, it wasn’t very surprising that the Church of the Dome’s artifacts were even weirder.

Giving it the benefit of a doubt, the ring looked like an antique. If it

was an ancient relic, it could probably be more valuable than Wilde's stone gargoyle sculpture and at least might be of some use.

But what's with this egg?

Lin Jie stared at the 'Insect Egg' placed in front of him. It appeared to be between 10 to 15 centimeters tall, with a translucent and silvery gray surface that was hard to the touch. On it were complex, winding patterns that reminded Lin Jie of Devil Fruits from One Piece.

The reason why Lin Jie coined it an 'Insect Egg' was because of that unidentified white organism wriggling inside it. From what he could see, Lin Jie reckoned it looked like a huge, fat baby silkworm...

Mmm, its tiny abdomen still twitches from time to time. It's actually rather cute.

Although such a big and also nice-looking insect egg was probably rare, what use could it have for Lin Jie?

I couldn't possibly boil it and have it as a protein supplement, could I?

Come on, Vincent, you really don't know how to play the game!

Aren't you already the leader of a whole faith? Talk about being a cheapskate. Shouldn't you get your people to send cases of cash over once you got the hint?

Then, they will stand in a row unlatching the cases and revealing stacks of banknotes and... Ahem, I've gotten sidetracked...

Lin Jie wouldn't mind being gifted something more precious either. By that, he meant objects that were valuable in monetary terms alone... The heart he had gotten previously was now completely dried and petrified and had largely lost its value as a collector's item. He had to regretfully store the heart, along with its case, in the basement.

Sigh, oh well...

The Sun's Faith had only been recently founded and was in need of money after all. It's only natural for Vincent to do so, at least he thought of me...

Lin Jie consoled himself. It really was impossible for him to become rich overnight just by relying on others.

And when he put more thought into it, he had merely used his words, helped contact the police, then casually got rid of a super weak baddie. These were all small contributions and he hadn't really done much.

—Gabriel was even weaker than Michael. At least Young Mike managed to put up a brief struggle and escape at last. Gabriel, on the other hand, had been crushed inside his dream realm.

Joseph and Vincent were the ones fighting the criminals in the front lines, and it was obvious that the process was both arduous and dangerous judging from the frail and exhausted state they were in.

On the contrary, Lin Jie was comfortably sleeping for three whole days in his shop and had an interesting dream.

When viewing it this way, Lin Jie felt a little guilty about his selfish thoughts.

Lin Jie suppressed his gloom and put on a professional smile.

He then took the ring and the egg from Vincent and said, "I really appreciate your kind intentions. Indeed, I do take a lot of interest in these kinds of objects. Thank you very much."

Lin Jie felt that he should take into account that Vincent was after all a former priest of the Church of the Dome and was now a senior religious figure of the new faith. In his eyes, these sorts of objects which purportedly had the power of divine blessings, while weird to the ordinary folk, might hold great importance to a religion.

In other words, Vincent felt that these sacred artifacts were the Church of the Dome's most valuable possessions.

Although Lin Jie was a little disappointed, he couldn't possibly let

Vincent down and waste his efforts.

Vincent hurried to say, “No, you’re flattering me. I should be thanking you. I could only be who I am today all thanks to your help.”

Find the original at **hosted** novel.

Even though he was no longer the insignificant priest he used to be and was going to become the pope of the Sun’s Faith which was soon to replace the Church of the Dome’s place as the largest faith in Norzin, he still behaved cautiously in front of Boss Lin.

However, Lin Jie didn’t feel very proud when hearing this. He frowned and reached out to pat Vincent on the shoulder and said earnestly, “Vincent, have more faith in yourself. My help isn’t the main reason you’ve achieved what you have today. It’s your own hard work and your persistence to find the truth and seek justice that helped you find a bright future that solely belongs to you.

“You managed to gather the first group of believers with your kindness in the past. You managed to convince them with your reputation and words, and with your teachings and public opinion, you managed to break down the Church of the Dome’s oppressive rule and finally destroy it.

“Isn’t this all your own strength?”

Vincent was momentarily stunned and made eye contact with Lin Jie’s burning gaze. Suddenly, he felt a throb in his heart.

His heart that had been empty and numb after fulfilling his revenge seemed full of vitality after a few strong throbs, filling him up with fresh, vigorous blood which made him feel excitement again.

Find the original at **hosted** novel.

That’s right!

He hadn’t realized that he had done so much with his own ability and personally killed Rodney, who was once far out of reach.

Thump thump...

The shadow of cowardice left behind by the old priest from the past seemed to be displaced by a new light.

Lin Jie continued on firmly, "I hope that in the future you will always shine brightly for your cause and provide light and warmth for good folk. Become the never-setting Sun in everyone's heart and guide the believers you lead, out of the long night that was the Church of the Dome's oppression.

"That is why you need to have faith in yourself. Show the grace of a Pope. You are a leader that thousands look up to now, and you have to show that to those who follow you! How can you live up to the expectations of those who trust you otherwise?

"The Old Father is watching you from heaven!"

Vincent felt blood surging throughout his entire body. Boss Lin was right. He was now carrying the trust and expectations from many more people and he was no longer alone.

His vengeance ended here, but there was still a long way to go.

And many more waiting to be saved by him!

He needed to become the Sun!

He looked back and met Joseph's firm gaze of encouragement, which clearly conveyed that even the Indomitable Sacred Flame approved of him.

Now filled with resolve, Vincent said resolutely, "You're right. I will become the qualified leader of the Sun's Faith and a guiding light in the hearts of believers. I promise!"

Lin Jie was glad to hear that. "Good. You must properly read the two books that I gave you. Whenever you feel helpless and lost, those books will definitely benefit and help you greatly."

Chapter 207: Don't Put It On

Chapter 207: Don't Put It On

Seeing how Vincent was inspired by Boss Lin ignited Joseph's fighting spirit. Immediately, his decadent lifestyle over the past two years came into mind.

Without Boss Lin, perhaps he too would've been like other former wielders of the demon sword, straying onto the path of madness and gradually succumbing to the devilry of the blade.

But now, besides being freed from the demon sword, he even had an opportunity to ascend to Supreme-rank.

He walked forward and patted Vincent's shoulder before speaking to Lin Jie sheepishly, "I've never collected objects as intriguing as these before.

"I've managed to save quite a sum from the years in my career, but I believe it isn't something that is of interest to you. However, so long as you're willing, you can mobilize my subordinates any time using this particular insignia of mine."

Joseph proceeded to take out an intricate gold badge from his chest pocket. The design was a shield with a pair of crossed swords on it. Stars and gems embellished the insignia and engraved at the very center was Joseph's name.

This was the medal of honor bestowed on him for becoming a Great Radiant Knight and it was something that wasn't casually passed around. If shown to a former subordinate or follower of his, they would immediately understand the one wielding this insignia was someone Joseph treated with great importance.

It had to be known that of his former subordinates, two of them already ascended to Destructive-rank and were granted the title of Great Radiant Knights. Hence, the weight of the badge Joseph held was of great importance.

No... I'd really still prefer the cold hard cash...

Lin Jie cried inwardly as he accepted the badge with a smile.

Old Wil, what a trendsetter you are. Now every one of them believes that I love crappy local souvenirs.

Truth be told, this badge was worth more than the two sacred artifacts that Vincent had gifted him. The ability to mobilize personnel from the Central Police Unit could be a pretty handy option in times of trouble.

But, the only problem was that Lin Jie didn't seem to have much interactions with the police, and this rundown bookstore didn't face any grave predicaments most of the time.

Lin Jie reckoned that Joseph must have a certain misunderstanding about him.

But it was the thought that counts and Lin Jie couldn't let his customer misjudge him.

"Speaking of which, Joseph, what was your position in the force?"

Lin Jie was suddenly reminded of his ignorance regarding the specific capacity that Joseph once held.

From their usual conversations, he could determine Joseph was a man who held a high position and probably had a great reputation, but only left the force due to setbacks as well as the influence of Candela's soul within the sword that caused him to decline.

Even though he had since left the service, it still appeared like he held an important position.

After all, even his disciple Claude was a police captain. The two policemen that had come to search the bookstore were nearly scared witless when they encountered their superior back then. Joseph must be of an even higher position to be able to order Claude about at will.

Incidentally, Claude hadn't come, so he must have probably been

covering the follow-up on behalf of his teacher.

A moment of silence for his hairline...

In his heart, Joseph told himself that there was no way Boss Lin didn't already know this. This whole situation was surely a prelude to something.

"Intelligence Division. I am currently the Section Chief of the Intelligence Division."

"Oh ... Intelligence Division."

Lin Jie calmly nodded his head as if he had a sudden revelation... not.

He was aware of the structure of a normal police station. The structure of Norzin's Central Police Unit should be similar, and yet he had never heard of the existence of an 'Intelligence Division.'

However, Joseph clearly wasn't trying to deceive him and the word 'Intelligence' was always associated with spies, espionage, and other such activities. This was probably why this secret branch wasn't made public.

This question did feel rather abrupt.

To mask his embarrassment, Lin Jie started to change the topic, "Speaking of which, you've already achieved a high position in the unit, any thoughts on progressing even further?"

Although he was not aware of the exact situation, eradicating a tumor of society like the Church of the Dome was not an easy feat. Besides Vincent, Joseph and Claude must've played the largest role.

Although this secret agency seemed like it held great weight and authority, Joseph would definitely have room to progress.

"Uhh..."

Joseph was at a loss for words. The four different divisions were already the entire composition of Secret Rite Tower, and a Great

Radiant Knight was simply just one of the ten strongest personnel chosen from within the organization.

His current appointment Chief of the Intelligence Division meant that he was already one of the four with the most authority on the surface. If he still wanted to climb further upwards, he would either need to recover his position as a Great Radiant Knight or claim a seat in the Council of Elders.

Joseph hesitated for a while before replying, “I might still need some time to think about it. After all, I’ve been away from the battlefield for quite some time and am quite satisfied with my current lifestyle.

“Also, I’ve pondered a lot over the last few years and slowly come to the notion that I still have some responsibilities since I’m a family man.

“I’ve never had time for Melissa in the prior years, which led to her having a somewhat strange personality and getting into trouble because she wanted attention.”

Yes... an imprudent child whose first impression is to demand an arm wrestling contest can rather aptly be described as attention-seeking.

Lin Jie nodded his head. “That’s not bad either. Though work is important, family is more important than that. By the way, Melissa purchased quite a few books when she came previously. Has she been studying hard? Do remind her to have a healthy work-life balance.”

Haa... It’s been a few months since the young lady’s visit. If presumably she has been spending all this time studying, surely she must have made some substantial progress.

Joseph’s lips twitched slightly. “She... spends all her time during this period locked in her room studying and hasn’t come out since. However, she seems to be in surprisingly good condition and is lively every day so you needn’t worry about her.”

He had heard a brief description from her daughter regarding her

visit to the bookstore and had understood that she had somewhat annoyed Boss Lin with her rash behavior.

However, it wasn't like Boss Lin would get bothered with a young kid and merely give a little lesson to prevent her from making worse mistakes in the future.

In addition, those books had brought about an even greater benefit for all involved.

"That's good to hear. Once she's done with her studies, she's welcomed to visit the bookstore to read the books here.

"Well, maybe the book cafe next door would better suit the tastes of youth like her... She has certainly caught my attention, perhaps I could even provide consultation for her in my free time."

_ Support us at hosted novel _

Time to attract more customers, thought Lin Jie to himself as he stroked his chin.

"Of course, of course," Joseph promised with a hearty laugh. To be held in high regard by Boss Lin was the best thing for Melissa.

After continuing their chat for a while more, Lin Jie waved the two goodbye.

Although the situation with the Church of the Dome had reached a conclusion, Vincent and Joseph still had many things to do and couldn't stay for long.

Mu'en, who was clearing the counter, also looked rather tired. Although Lin Jie didn't notice it previously, he now had realized that Mu'en's skin seemed to have lightened a few tones.

Mu'en had always been rather pale in the past, but not to this extent. Now, her skin was as white as moonlight and ghostly pale. Her skin seemed flawless and sparkled like gemstones.

Lin Jie couldn't help but pinch Mu'en's cheeks and pull them wide apart.

“Drr...” Mu’en couldn’t speak clearly with her cheeks being pulled. She had a confused look on her face as if she had suddenly recalled something.

She pointed to the ring and struggled to express herself, “Dorr... Drrt... Put it on...”

“Put it on?” Lin Jie asked as picked up the ring to try it on and found that it fit onto his ring finger snugly. However, when trying to remove it, Lin Jie realized he couldn’t do so.

Tugging at it twice to no avail, he frowned. “Seems like I can’t remove this ring. I haven’t even washed it yet... Who knows how unsanitary it is after being consecrated for so long.”

Mu’en’s face fell.

She had intended to say not to put it on...

Chapter 208: Stone Gargoyle: WTF?!

Chapter 208: Stone Gargoyle: WTF?!

Witnessing Lin Jie fiddling with the stuck ring made Mu'en's entire body go limp.

Walpurgis had specifically reminded her to recover that ring because it was the very same ring of contract Walpurgis had given to the Moon for safekeeping back then. The ring symbolized the covenant made with those who sought her protection; back when she still controlled the Night, that is.

Afterwards, as dreams extended into reality, causing the moon to die and have its power stolen, the ring was also taken due to its symbolism for its concepts of 'contract' and 'compliance,' making it an essential object to be used for the summoning ritual of the false god.

Though 'Walpurgis Night' represented the blessings and protection of the Primordial Witches, it was first established by Walpurgis, hence the name.

However, ever since the Third Era, Walpurgis' anointed could no longer locate the Primordial Witch whom they were bound to.

Of course, after the Dark Age ended, they no longer required this protection and as such, each and everyone went their own ways, some perishing while others prospered.

Only those who viewed Primordial Witches as their faith would continue their persistence in pursuing any signs of the Primordial Witches in this relatively peaceful era.

The Iris Clan that Doris was affiliated with was one such example...

What was Mu'en going to do now?

Mu'en stared hard at the ring that was now steadfastly affixed onto the finger of her boss. Did this mean that the covenant had now been transferred onto her boss?

In most circumstances, the odds of such an occurrence was nil.

After all, this was a transcendental relic, and it was impossible for there to be no prerequisites involved.

For instance, the past iterations of popes had all regarded the ring as a sacred artifact and it was only explicitly worn during special ceremonies, and not a single one of them had received the ring's approval.

Though Walpurgis was rather lazy and hadn't set up any prerequisites, the ring itself still had an innate threshold—the bearer needed to possess a dream realm of their own.

Beyond dream realms, this threshold was unreasonably lofty. Besides the four Primordial Witches, no one could possibly achieve it.

That was the case... originally.

But Mu'en had already witnessed it with her own eyes... Boss Lin didn't just have a dream realm, he had one where he held absolute control over it.

Mu'en was now at a complete loss.

"Hmm? Do you like this ring a lot, Mu'en?"

Lin Jie noticed Mu'en's gaze, but he still dragged on and made no conscious effort to remove the ring.

He shrugged helplessly. "This ring has probably been left alone for far too long, and it feels 'rusty.' I'll attempt to remove the ring with soap later on, and it will be yours."

Having a ring stuck after putting it on was a rather common occurrence. However, every problem has a solution, and the ring

couldn't possibly remain stuck on the finger forever.

Mu'en was speechless at the bunch of hogwash her boss had just said. If this ring could be removed with soap, Boss Lin would be raking in loads of money already.

Given Boss Lin's level, he definitely knew the symbolism of this ring.

This meant that he was doing it intentionally. He wanted to keep the ring for sure, yet refused to be direct and instead went as far as to tease her.

If the Boss desired the ring, the assistant could only relinquish it.

"No need, thank you for the offer, Boss. I think it rather suits you.

"I'm feeling tired, please excuse me," with a deadpan expression, Mu'en gave a slight bow.

Lin Jie acknowledged, then watched the child turn and leave. He then returned his attention back to the ring.

Why does it seem like she's peeved...

Did she, in fact, want this ring, but I misread the signs and put it on, which made her feel like I was toying with her feelings?

Haa... It's really hard to guess what's on a child's mind...

Lin Jie thought to himself with the shake of a head. *Or... was I too engrossed in conversing with Joseph and Vincent that I forgot to praise her?*

Hmm... This could be the case. Her efforts were quite substantial, especially running the book cafe and keeping things in check. This indeed warrants a reward and I forgot to take this into consideration.

But now, he had to first deal with the ring and... that egg of probably some strange creature.

As he glanced at that insect egg, that baby 'silkworm' within

seemed to shrink a little, and Lin Jie wondered if he was seeing things.

“Don’t be afraid, I won’t boil and eat you up.”

Lin Jie gently patted the egg as one would with a melon and the baby silkworm became still.

Lin Jie felt pleased with himself. This little thing seemed rather active, but it appeared like his words had gotten through and managed to calm it down, which meant that he had gotten its trust.

As expected of a sacred artifact worshiped by the Church of the Dome.

As for how it got this large, Lin Jie would probably have to ask the Church of the Dome how they managed to keep it alive for so many years after consecrating it.

Perhaps this is some sort of mythical creature passed down from the First or Second Era, but the Church of the Dome only knew to use it for synthesizing Holy Moon Essence to brainwash people and never once attempted to incubate it.

This was Lin Jie’s hypothesis.

However, he wasn’t sure what would hatch out from the egg either.

Moreover, what was he to do with the creature if it hatched out. Make it his pet?

Never mind, let’s leave it alone for the time being.

Lin Jie placed the egg beside the stone gargoyle, then hurriedly dashed upstairs to find some soap for removing the ring.

.

The motionless insect egg sat silently on the spot for a while, then suddenly it started rocking from side to side and fell onto the gargoyle in the process, causing its shell to be punctured by the sharp, pointed edges of the gargoyle’s wing.

Crack. Crack...

Tiny cracks started to form on the silvery gray surface of the insect egg. The large ivory worm inside wriggled, and a head popped out of the shell. This larva consisted entirely of writhing, intertwined tentacles, with even more tiny, wavy tentacles for little feet.

At the moment, it was pulsing continuously and looked like a ball of fluff because it had been so densely compacted.

On its slightly larger head, a single yellow, bloodshot eye opened up.

If either Vincent or Joseph were on scene, they would have discovered that this creature closely mirrored the false god, just that it was merely lacking the sullied tint that shrouded it.

And from the false god's final attack—those white flapping tentacles—perhaps its true form had been just like this plump white thing.

With its countless tentacles wriggling ceaselessly, the worm emerged from the egg and crawled onto the stone gargoyle. The tentacles started anchoring onto the stone sculpture before finally blanketing it entirely. Once that was done, the larva's mandibles split open and chomped on the head of the stone gargoyle, as two separate tongues covered the sculpture's rubied eyes.

Slurp~

The larva's frame began pulsating as if it was sucking on something. The core power within the stone gargoyle, those souls that nearly numbered a thousand stored within the sculpture, was ingested by this creature and the outline of skulls could be seen as they struggled against the larva's body.

The ruby eyes of the stone gargoyles glowed a bright scarlet at first and struggled in a bid to transform, but eventually the glow as a portion of its head broke off with a loud crack.

Finally satisfied, the chubby larva released its grip on the gargoyle.

With a curious gaze, it stared at the stone sculpture. Then, akin to

mimicry, its body began to undergo several transformations.

Four additional larger limbs grew out as well as two horns budded on the top of its head. Its single eyeball bisected into two and a long thin tail sprouted on its back. Finally done, it copied the half-sitting posture of the gargoyle.

Lin Jie was still unsuccessful in removing the ring. As he made his way downstairs, he made a startling discovery.

Sitting on the counter-top was a... cat?!

Chapter 209: He Will Return From The Dead

Chapter 209: He Will Return From The Dead

“Huh??”

With a look of confusion, Lin Jie stared at the chubby and fluffy white creature on the table.

Two pointed ears, that long swishing tail and that curious pose it was in.

Yep, definitely a cat.

He then caught sight of the damaged stone gargoyle as well as the eggshell fragments on the table.

A seemingly bizarre conclusion came to his mind — this cat had hatched from the ‘insect egg.’

No, since it's a cat that hatched out of the egg, shouldn't this 'insect egg' be called a 'cat egg' instead?

Lin Jie's mouth twitched. This phenomenon, which greatly violated the laws of biology, would have definitely made Darwin climb out of his grave to investigate this anomaly.

However, this was another world, so Darwin held no sway here.

Based on the current circumstances, Lin Jie could roughly guess what had happened while he had been away. The egg had probably gotten into an accidental collision with the stone gargoyle and neither came out on top. The stone gargoyle split open, and the eggshell was cracked, resulting in the aforementioned scene with the cat.

By the way, isn't this egg really that hard?

But... since a cat can even be an oviparous species here, having a tough eggshell really isn't that shocking...

Lin Jie felt that his previous hypothesis was spot on; this was indeed a mythical creature worshiped by the Church of the Dome.

He slowly approached the counter as these thoughts swirled in his mind.

The larva that had just completed its transformation was wagging its tail, but upon catching sight of Lin Jie's happy grin, it froze up entirely.

Lin Jie reached out and scratched the 'white cat's' nape skillfully, then lifted it up and gave it a good look.

"Hmm, this cat looks a little weird. Is it disabled?" muttered Lin Jie as he stroked his chin.

"There aren't any pupils within those yellow irises..."

The larva brandished its claws in a futile struggle: "..."

Lin Jie placed a finger near the 'white cat's' eye socket and pressed down gently. "Isn't there a need for medical advice for this condition?"

"But this thing isn't an ordinary cat either, would a vet really help?" Lin Jie muttered to himself.

The larva felt a powerful wave of sensation reverberating within its skull, causing it to panic in fear. Hurriedly, it started to form small rounded pupils within its eyes, wanting to prove that it did have pupils, though small.

"Oh, they were probably too constricted that I missed it... But why are these ears also strange? I wonder where the ear holes are..."

Aware of Lin Jie pinching its two 'horns,' the larva hastily modified its appearance again.

"Ahh, the long fur was covering it..." Lin Jie had another sudden

realization.

He petted the ‘cat’s’ back, discovering that its smooth and oily coat did not feel that nice to touch. Then, he put his hand under its armpits and lifted the cat up in the air.

“Give me a meow?” asked Lin Jie with a smile.

The chubby larva kicked its hind legs at the air twice before purring softly with a dazzled look on its face.

“Aw~ How cute.”

Lin Jie placed the cat back down and began to stroke its furry chin. “From now on, your name is ‘Whitey’ and you can live in the bookstore, I’ll prepare a cat bed for you later.”

Hearing this, the ‘white cat’ stiffened up and raised its head to look at Lin Jie.

This was met with another bright smile from Lin Jie. “You will have to behave yourself. This gargoyle was a gift from a client that I am well acquainted with. I’m actually extremely peeved now that you’ve destroyed it. Do you understand?”

“Of course, I’m not so heartless as to boil such a cute little cat.”

Boss Lin petted the head of ‘Whitey’ gently.

“Unless I really feel like eating you.”

Whitey’s tail shot up in fear. As it noticed the ring on Lin Jie’s ring finger, it mewed softly, then lowered its head in a submissive pose.

Patting his newly adopted cat companion, Lin Jie turned his attention to the mess still on the counter-top.

Cleaning the eggshells would be easy, but dealing with the gargoyle was going to be a headache.

Repairing a work of art like this gargoyle sculpture was no easy feat, and getting the help of others to fix it might result in an

unsatisfactory outcome.

He'd better wait for Old Wil's next visit and have him restore the sculpture in person.

"Sigh, I really do feel like I've let Old Wil down." Lin Jie couldn't help feeling a sense of guilt. This stone gargoyle had only been here for a few months and it was now split open.

He picked up Whitey again and caressed it. "Remember to pull your own weight and act cute. Oh, I also don't mind if you help to watch the house. Otherwise you wouldn't be of use."

"Meow~"

Whitey let out an increasingly proficient cat meow as its body trembled.

Satisfied, Lin Jie placed Whitey onto the ground before making his way to the basement downstairs to look for materials for crafting a cat bed.

Joseph first made his way back to the Church of the Dome to oversee the work of the Intelligence Division. Only after matters were finished did he return back to Secret Rite Tower headquarters.

Mere moments after arriving, he received a new report.

"Margaret, Head of Medicine at the Truth Union, was attacked by an unknown transcendent being?"

Joseph frowned. "From what I can recall, isn't she from the Sandra Clan? This clan which specializes in arcane medicine isn't one to be trifled with. This clan has always kept a low-profile, so logically speaking, they shouldn't have any enemies."

Claude, with a file in his hands, nodded in agreement. Despite being a transcendent being, eye bags were still something he couldn't escape having.

“Indeed, according to the aetheric traces found at the scene, the assailant utilized a forbidden technique ‘Blood-gate.’ We had just apprehended all the previous retailers of this spell scroll, and it’s highly likely that the assailant is from Blood Feast.”

Joseph’s eyes narrowed. “Zuikaku?”

‘Blood Cursed Mage’ Zuikaku — a Destructive-rank magician and one of the founding members of Blood Feast. He was someone backed by the Path of the Flaming Sword and the owner of Congreve’s human skin book.

Some time ago, he had fallen for a trap set by the bookstore owner and had been reduced to a blubbing fool by the indescribable horrors Joseph had summoned.

His iconic techniques were utilizing blood as a medium to perform different forbidden spells.

“Which means to say that there’s an objective and an organization behind this attack. Given the exact timing, this incident might be a repeat of the last.

“They struck just as we were occupied with storming the Church of the Dome.”

“What’s the situation now?” Joseph asked.

Claude replied, “Margaret’s current whereabouts remains undetermined. The Sandra Clan are furious and have made known their reservations regarding Secret Rite Tower and the Truth Union. They are planning to send their own personnel to search for her...”

Joseph’s face fell. “Are they a bunch of idiots?! An organization like the Blood Feast must have conspired beforehand to dare attack someone with Margaret’s background.

“It’s highly likely that this is instigated by the Path of the Flaming Sword. Perhaps their target was the Sandra Clan all along who are currently delivering themselves into the enemy’s hands.”

“I’ve already mentioned this to them.” Claude gave a bitter laugh.

“But as you already know, older clans like these are stubborn in their ways. They still believe in Walpurgis even till now. Changing their minds about this is nigh impossible.”

Joseph took a deep breath and continued with his questioning, “What about Zuikaku? Any ideas on getting him to talk?”

“We’ve tried using a sobering agent as well as some other methods. However, all we’ve barely managed to do was to bring him to a semi-deranged state. We could only squeeze a limited amount of information out of him, and all of it was just basic info.

“The interrogation, however, is placing too much pressure on his body and he is just barely holding on,” Claude replied.

At this moment, a subordinate rushed in and reported, “Zuikaku has killed himself!

“He had a moment of clarity before his death and swore that he will return from the dead for his revenge. It seems like he had casted a resurrection spell in his human skin book!”

Lin Jie halted his sawing. It felt like a dream creature seemed to have broken into his dream realm.

Chapter 210: What Business Is It Of Yours If I Were To Destroy You

Chapter 210: What Business Is It Of Yours If I Were To Destroy You

Zuikaku was unable to accept it.

As a Destructive-rank magician, his self-esteem had always been high. He wasn't just assured in his own strength but confident in his intelligence as well.

After all, not just anyone could just build up a 50-member-strong magician corp on their own and make an illustrious name for themselves.

Most Destructive-ranks were lone wolves and preferred not to train, guide, or regulate the ability of others.

Being able to groom 50 people meant that he had the ability to train 500 or even 5000 members. Creating such a force was indeed effortless for him, and it was mostly his own disdain for the task that Zuikaku chose not to do so.

After establishing Blood Feast, he had control over a thousand transcendent beings and held status akin to an emperor which further elevated his already inflated ego.

Moreover, with that mysterious organization, Path of the Flaming Sword, placing him in such high regard and learning the so-called 'Truth of the World' gave Zuikaku a sense of innate predominance over the ignorant masses, making him feel superior.

However, the most recent fiasco had utterly brought down the supercilious magician's sense of superiority and stomped it in the mud mercilessly.

Being captured and brought back to Secret Rite Tower for questioning by Joseph was a disorientating period for Zuikaku. His thoughts were a mess and his mind in utter disarray, causing him to be unaware of the on-goings around him.

_ Support us at hosted novel _

That was until Secret Rite Tower started administering medicine, which allowed Zuikaku to gradually regain his lucidity and gave him the opportunity to escape.

The human skin book of his had pages entirely made out of baby skin, and this had been an extremely complex process.

Thus, the book wasn't just used for communication purposes and actually had a portion of his soul sewn into it as well.

As long as he implemented the specific incantations and procedures before killing himself, Zuikaku could use the human skin book to resurrect himself!

Of course, everything relied on him being sane in the first place.

This time, he really had to thank Secret Rite Tower.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha! I will return from the dead and kill every one of you!”

Zuikaku's neck was contorted and his head was drooping, yet he laughed maniacally at the panicked knights guarding his cell.

He had largely recovered his sanity but had continued with this facade in order to lull his interrogators into a false sense of security. The humiliation he had experienced over these past few days would never be forgotten.

Just you wait!

Even though he currently had nothing, the determination and perseverance of a Destructive-rank was not to be underestimated. He would make a comeback sooner or later!

And at that time, Secret Rite Tower would face his wrath!

He would hunt down each and every one of them to use as materials for his human skin book!

With this in mind, he closed his eyes sluggishly and promptly lost his consciousness.

Lin Jie could suddenly sense a new addition to his dream realm.

Ever since he finished constructing his dream realm, this entire dream has become a somewhat private room of his own.

Access to his dream realm wasn't just limited to when he fell asleep at night. He could still effectively remove and add objects into it at any point in time, like when he recently placed a stack of documented notes as well as a bunch of random stuff into the dream realm.

Such as Candela's sacred sword, the human skin book...

Of course, there were certain things within the realm that couldn't be removed.

His body also couldn't enter the dream realm whenever he liked, and it could only be done by 'meditating' or other similar approaches.

Nevertheless, his control over the dream realm still remained, and he was always completely aware of the state of affairs within.

Now, for instance, Lin Jie was acutely aware of the human skin book's movement which he had placed on the bookshelf. The book jolted before its pages flipped open in a flutter despite the evident lack of a breeze.

The pages were flipped with added haste and the writings on the book, akin to a madman's gibberish, began to liquefy into a dense coagulation of blood-stains.

After which, the pages began excreting thick and fresh blood, which gushed out like a current. As the scarlet liquid splattered onto the ground, it transfigured into a slime-like creature whose form gradually changed to resemble that of a human.

“What is with this freaky dream creature?” Lin Jie halted his woodwork and exclaimed with a frown.

The previous creature that entered the dream realm had been a mismatched amalgamation of a humanoid.

That, by itself, was already creepy enough, but now there was an even more outlandish presence of a slime made of blood.

Creatures of the dream realm are all relatively grotesque, but this feels much too disgusting, thought Lin Jie to himself.

All the more so since this thing had used the human skin book as a medium to ‘seep’ into the realm.

Unlike the patchwork monster from before, where Lin Jie would’ve closely observed to see whether the situation could be turned around into a business opportunity, right now, he just wanted to kill this thing.

To Lin Jie, this slime creature was like a giant fly buzzing around his clean and orderly house, which repulsed him.

While Lin Jie had these thoughts, he noticed that the bloody slime had started to move.

Initially, as though it was lost, it oscillated its head side to side, scanning its surroundings. Then, it picked up the human skin book and did a little display as if celebrating wildly on the spot.

Immediately after, it began squirming toward the stack of documented notes Lin Jie had placed on the coffee table, leaving behind a bloody trail.

Lin Jie decided that enough was enough.

Find the original at **hosted** novel.

It now felt as if a vagrant had broken into his immaculate house. A filthy and pungent burglar about to mess with this stuff.

It wasn't just connected to the human skin book but had a sinister appearance as well. How was it any different from pests like flies and mosquitoes?

Better swat it to death.

With this thought in mind, an invisible force immediately materialized within the dream realm and the bloody slime was then swatted by a seemingly intangible palm.

It struggled wildly as blood splattered all over the place. During the process, it let out a gurgling noise and lifted the human skin book high up in the air for no apparent reason.

This gave Lin Jie a shocking surprise.

The blood-stains on the human skin book underwent another transformation, returning back to its original shape which resembled writings.

He had only one thought in his mind— *This thing can actually use the human skin book?!*

Anything that can use this unholy book is definitely something nefarious!

And judging from its doing, is it trying to unleash a super-powered move?!

I definitely need to remove this threat in case something bad happens and my dream realm gets destroyed, Lin Jie thought to himself.

Thus, he applied additional pressure.

—

Zuikaku thought that he was finally free.

He had finally been resurrected with the aid of the human skin book. Even though opening his eyes to a foreign environment had

given him a scare, he was however relieved to find that his surroundings were void of human life and seemed rather serene.

Zuikaku scanned his surroundings and realized he was likely to be in the residence of some academic or scholar. The entire place was eerily tranquil with only stacks of documented notes and books around.

He had surmised that the human skin book would've been lost in some other place, yet it had instead been kept in an environment perfect for his post-resurrection recovery.

"Ha-ha-ha-ha...!" Zuikaku laughed heartily as he picked up the human skin book.

Isn't this the grace of the Gods?

Now, all he needed to do was successfully escape Secret Rite Tower's pursuit and contact the Path of the Flaming Sword. His comeback was just around the corner!

After composing himself, Zuikaku cautiously approached the coffee table with the intention of determining the identity of this place's owner as well as to find out if there was any information beneficial to him.

Yet before he could take another step, an ominous sensation came over him. It felt as if someone was peering at him as the premonition of an imminent crisis arose.

And at that instant, an unstoppable force descended and crushed him entirely.

"A t-trap!"

Every single bone in Zuikaku's body rattled in unison and started cracking under the pressure as his eyes were torn apart by the force. After casting several spells, he finally concluded that he was no match for this unstoppable force.

In a show of sincerity, he raised the human skin book in a hurry, recording down all the spells he had learned in his lifetime on it.

“Spare me!!

“I surrender!!

“I am willing to relinquish all of my knowledge to You!

“Please don’t kill me!” he cried out.

Still, the originator of this invisible force paid no attention to him. Instead, the intensity of the said force increased, causing him to collapse and howl in agony.

Eventually, he was completely flattened.

It was only at this moment did Zuikaku recall the shrills of all the babies he had skinned.

Hadn’t he also been unable to hear their cries for mercy back when he was taking those innocent lives?

On this day, he had finally had a taste of his own medicine—

What business is it of yours if I were to destroy you.

Splat!

Just like swatting a fly with a slipper, the barely humanoid bloody slime combusted spontaneously, turning into a splatter of blood-stains.

Lin Jie cleaned up the stains with a clear revolt before picking up the human skin book.

Swish...

He flipped open a page of the book only to discover that written on it now were... spells?

Chapter 211: This Other World Is Real Dangerous!

Chapter 211: This Other World Is Real Dangerous!

After ‘swatting’ the slime dream creature to its death and cleaning up all the bloody stains, Lin Jie leaned against the wall in his basement and proceeded to extract the human skin book from within his dream realm.

He flipped the first book and discovered that the text inside were seemingly spells.

That’s right. Spells.

Lin Jie continued flipping pages till the book’s center gutter. Written on this page was a description on how the ‘human skin book’ was bound as well as how to use it.

On further thought, Lin Jie was certain the slime he had killed definitely was bad news and must have some sort of relationship with the human skin book.

Otherwise, it couldn’t have been able to use the human skin book and write down the usage method as well as other evil spells.

There’s no doubt it was trying to attack me using these spells!

Unless, it was some sort of ‘familiar spirit’ left behind by the owner of the human skin book?

If the owner could summon a ‘familiar’ out of the human skin book to attack the thief upon discovering that the book had been stolen, it’s pretty much a foolproof contingency!

This other world is really dangerous!!

Lin Jie was deeply perturbed.

Had he kept the human skin book in his bookstore rather than his dream realm, he might perhaps have been sneaked upon by this humanoid slime when he slept.

Lin Jie's physique had improved tremendously after learning swordsmanship from Silver, and he had come out on top in his past confrontations of people with transcendent ability (Michael and Gabriel).

However, he was convinced that those two had been weaklings and there existed beings who were more powerful in this world, just that he had yet to meet them.

Surely there wouldn't be just one being of Silver's power level in this world.

Lin Jie reckoned that he ought to be more cautious. He now had proof that transcendent powers existed in Azir and had also pretty much offended the only criminal organization of transcendent beings he knew of, 'Path of the Flaming Sword,' and therefore could no longer afford to be as carefree as he was in the past.

"Just so happens I've got matters to speak with Silver about, especially the incident with the dragon heart..." muttered Lin Jie as he subconsciously rubbed his chest, vaguely feeling the loud thumping of his heart.

Other than the previous incident where he had been inexplicably irritated and gave Young Mike a beat down, there had been no other strange anomalies since then.

However, he couldn't shake off the feeling that the incandescent energy that had emanated from the dragon heart had affected his heart and body.

He then recalled the time where Blackie refused to answer his calls for help. Could it have been because it could detect the incandescence was not only harmless but instead beneficial as well?

"I think I'll enter Silver's dream realm and have a chat with her tonight." Shaking his head, Lin Jie continued to scrutinize the

human skin book.

The basement was lit up by a single dilapidated kerosene lamp. Under the dim light, it made the bloody words that filled up the grainy pages of the thin human skin book seem all the more creepier, an image he associated with horror stories.

As he flipped through the pages, Lin Jie muttered, “Silver once said that the reason I felt Candela’s memories were fragmented is due to my inability to understand those concepts, including that so-called ‘Divine Arts’... But looking at it now, those ‘Divine Arts’ were simply sorcery to Candela.”

And the reason he came up with such a conclusion was simple...

Because as he attempted to decipher the writings in the human skin book, the memories of the elven king Candela gradually got clearer.

And eventually become complete.

Approaching it how he would from an academic standpoint, Lin Jie meticulously read every page. “The contents of the first 20 pages coincides with the ‘Divine Arts’ Candela had pursued in his youth, though the later pages are completely differing...

“This part, I guess, probably requires learning ‘fundamental magic,’ much like compulsory education to set down a foundation before pursuing different specializations...”

Lin Jie soon found himself sitting cross-legged on the floor with his face leaning on his palm and elbow resting on his leg.

As he continued reading, he had another thought. *It looks like the magic and sorcery from the Second Era and earlier has been passed down through the ages. But since a large majority of the information has been lost through time, these spells are much harder to learn now.*

The human skin book totaled around 100 pages, with the first 20 being dedicated to stuff Candela had learnt before he was 10.

Assuming the contents of this book was the entire knowledge its owner possessed, this was akin to stuff learned in kindergarten

taking up a fifth of all the knowledge.

It could be described as rather nurturing.

However, the owner of this human skin book was far from nurturing and could even be described as the epitome of heinousness.

After the 20th page, the contents within the pages was a stark contrast to Candela's memory, like a vagrant going down the path of crime and reaching a point of no return.

More than half of the spells required the specific usage of fresh human blood as the basis for spellcasting. Furthermore, it also specified that blood from a human moments before their death had endowed special properties and as such, the subject should be tortured in countless ways before having their blood drained.

Anyone would have gotten shivers just reading this.

A small number of spells didn't actually require a living human to be killed, though they still inadvertently required a human corpse of sorts. Lin Jie could only scrunch up his brows as he proceeded to skim through all the information and only stopped at a relatively normal spell.

'Blood Curse, Dying Blood Spirit Transfer.'

The effect of this spell was to allow the caster to temporarily transfer their consciousness into the blood of a person near death (the person has to be dying and not actually dead). After which, the caster would then replace the original's soul and take over the body.

With any luck, so long as this person's soul managed to undo control before it dissipated and received immediate treatment, that person would still have a chance to live.

But from a different angle, if not for the death of the caster as a prerequisite, this could actually make a great life-saving skill.

Indeed, there are no wicked abilities, only wicked people. I think it's

better if I pass this book over to Joseph since it's considered a plundered object.

A virtuous person like him would definitely find a way to use these wicked spells for good, thought Lin Jie to himself as he rubbed his chin.

Meanwhile, he had already memorized the first 20 pages of fundamental spells.

The only issue now was that he had no idea how to harness his aether to cast them.

Currently, all of the aether he grasped had been used to construct his dream realm and he was constantly channeling whatever he had to continuously expand his dream realm.

How in the world was he going to squeeze out excess aether to learn these spells...

"I'd better consult Silver about this." Lin Jie stood up and dusted himself off.

After finally finishing his woodwork, he left the basement with the cat bed and the human skin book in tow.

"He-he put the ring on?"

Walpurgis' eyes widened in surprise and she jumped down from her crescent moon rocking chair perch, landing lightly on the water with stars reflected on them, and paced around in circles barefooted.

Mu'en nodded.

"And now, he can't take it off?"

Mu'en nodded again.

Walpurgis gasped with slight disappointment. “Oh my, the contractual ring contains the covenant I made with those who prayed for my protection. Now that he has worn the ring and activated it, the anointed must have felt the change, and they’ll mistake him for me...”

Besides killing the false god to prove the real moon, she had another motive as well—to fulfill the past covenant.

What she was to do now that the ring had been taken by someone else...

Even though she was somehow unable to see through this fellow, the contractual ring was ultimately still a representation of her identity. She had to get it back!

“How do I get it back?” Mu’en asked blankly.

_ Support us at hosted novel _

Walpurgis looked straight at her and suggested, “Sneak into his room at night and...”

Chapter 212: Silvers Ring

Chapter 212: Silver's Ring

Pale white petals danced in the air, blending into the flurry of falling snow.

Lin Jie opened his eyes, gazing ahead. The graceful back of a silver-haired lady dressed in white satin came into his view. Her head was raised, staring at the giant tree above before her.

The scenery surrounding him was dream-like, but Lin Jie now understood that these were all illusory objects created by aether. If he wanted, he could alter and deconstruct the entire area.

He continued on-wards along the flowery path he was well acquainted with.

Having heard movement, Silver turned around and gave him a smile. An ivory-white thorn of crowns sat on her head, and tucked behind her ears was the iris flower Lin Jie had given her at their first encounter.

No matter how many times I look at this virtually perfect face, I still can't help but be stunned by her beauty... Lin Jie thought to himself.

He then walked over to Silver's side and willed a white wooden bench to appear amid a flutter of snowflakes and petals.

He sat straightaway and patted the empty space beside him.

With a slight grin, Silver lifted the hems of her skirt and sat down beside him. "It seems you are getting more proficient in building and altering dream realms."

Lin Jie glanced at Silver sitting regally on the bench, as if she were royalty, and felt like he was in the movie 'Roman Holiday.'

Just like the reporter who had 'abducted' Princess Ann, he too felt

like he had dragged a fairy into the undeserving realm of mortals.

He coughed lightly and replied, "It's just passable. I've already tried out making the dream realm descend and hence influencing reality. It felt... wonderful."

"When your dream realm overlaps with reality, it results in the folding, projection, and distortion of time and space. Those who are shrouded by the dream realm also experience changes, and their consciousness will be guided by your dream realm, just as if having a dream," sailed Silver.

"In the end, a dream realm is still a dream realm, after all. If yours isn't stable, the fluctuations within will be of a larger extent, resulting in greater discrepancies with reality."

Lin Jie gave a thoughtful nod. "I see."

This explanation was close to his own thought process. The fantasy scenes he had witnessed in the dream realm was most likely a result of those people letting their subconscious go wild because they had been forcibly dragged into the dream realm.

With Silver's explanation, he now had a better understanding about what had happened then.

Who would've thought that those bunch with their bushy eyebrows all have a case of 'Chuunibyou-ism.'

This had also been why Lin Jie had given Joseph and Vincent a strange look when he saw them after waking up. Still, he wouldn't poke fun at them, for he understood that all men would be young at heart till the day they die.

As for Mu'en... It was even more straightforward for this child. She had already said she wished to become the Moon and enforce justice...

She was Sailor Moon in the dream.

Lin Jie gazed at the towering dragon tree above him and said, "One of my customers gave me a dragon heart, but ..."

“But you ended up absorbing all of the energy within the heart,” Silver replied with a smile.

Lin Jie nodded, heaving a sigh of relief at the same time. His guess had been right all along.

Since Silver had known of this and it didn't seem like something bad, then it means that the fruit she gave before as well as this fruit tree are all linked to dragons... The fossils of this world aren't of dinosaurs, but actual dragons of legend!

Furthermore, it seemed that there were changes to Lin Jie's body after he had eaten the fruit, which resulted in a resonance with the dragon heart, allowing him to drain all of its energy.

I've blamed you wrongly, Blackie!

With a slight glance, Silver could tell that the current Lin Jie before her radiated with an aura very similar to those of Dragon-kind — a tint of dark gold hidden within his onyx eyes, pronounced heartbeats, and a constant intimidating pressure all around him.

Although, it would seem that he was still unaware of it.

If Lin Jie was willing, becoming a fully-fledged dragon wasn't too hard to achieve.

And that dragon heart... was definitely no coincidence.

Everything mystical had its own flow.

Akin to water flowing toward the lowest point, when one's level of mystery were to reach a certain concentration, other mysteries would also be attracted.

Interesting... Silver eyed Lin Jie with piqued curiosity.

Lin Jie wasn't embarrassed from the prolonged stares. After all, being looked at by someone didn't hurt.

“Oh right, should I continue expanding my dream realm?” Lin Jie shrugged it off and continued the conversation.

He took out the human skin book and explained the entire gist of it.

Then, he asked, “I would like to section a part of my aether to learn these spells, can you teach me how?”

Silver blinked twice, then her lips curled into a slightly crafty smile. “You’ve yet to master your swordsmanship, and you want to learn something else now. Where are my lesson fees?”

Lin Jie gave a nervous cough as beads of sweat formed on his forehead. *Why did I say that? I just made myself seem halfhearted in my efforts to learn!*

This was the very principle of ‘don’t bite off more than you can chew.’ However, compared to swordsmanship, Lin Jie was more interested in magic. After all, as a civilian, fighting and killing wasn’t really his cup of tea.

Silver smile then widened. “How about this? Give me that ring on your finger.”

She had already noticed the ring Lin Jie wore ever since his arrival.

The contractual ring of Walpurgis... or in other words, two out of the four Primordial Witches that went into hiding within dream realms had already interacted with Lin Jie since then.

Lin Jie lifted up his hand and discovered that the ring he had just worn had also followed him into the dream realm. When he tried to take it off again, he found that the ring actually loosened here and it could now be removed.

But he hesitated for a moment as the image of the Mu’en sulking appeared in his mind. She seemed rather fond of the ring, even going so far as to throw a tantrum over it.

If Lin Jie were to give the ring away without saying a word, wouldn’t Mu’en get angrier...

“Let’s change it to something else. This ring is rather important.” Lin Jie gazed at Silver, and the latter wasn’t insistent.

Instead, Silver reached out and plucked an iris flower in front of the bench. She promptly plucked all the petals, leaving behind the stem which she fashioned into a ring.

Beaming as she passed the flower stem ring over, Silver's said, "Well, put on my ring as well, and I'll teach you magic."

"..." Lin Jie reckoned that this wouldn't be too big a deal based on the smile she gave. And just like learning swordsmanship, he felt that he could only gain from this.

Moreover, having already rejected her once, doing so a second time would be impolite.

"Alright."

Before Lin Jie could reach out his hand, Silver had already put it on for him.

A wide-eyed 'Mu'en' pushed open the door to her boss' room and entered.

Had Lin Jie been awake, he would've immediately figured out that this Mu'en was a fake.

How could a stoic girl like her display such rich emotions? It was impossible.

In truth, this was Walpurgis possessing Mu'en's body.

Ever since recovering the Moon's authority, Walpurgis had also regained her power. Now, she was once again free to voluntarily exit the dream realm.

She was met with the sight of dense flesh scattered throughout the room like cobwebs as she pushed open the door. She mouthed to herself in disgust, "How dare Silver be so full of herself, not even bothering to conceal herself when..."

She was then at a loss for words where she caught sight of an iris

flower sprout from the wall with a twisting vine which landed softly on Lin Jie's other hand and formed a ring.

Staring in shock, Walpurgis could tell a covenant was being made...
A Witch so arrogant she never even considered a covenant with humans, Silver, had actually made one with a human?!

Chapter 213: Walpurgis Felt Cheated On

Chapter 213: Walpurgis Felt Cheated On

A human, yes. At least... appearance-wise...

As she recovered from her momentary shock, Walpurgis looked at Lin Jie, lying blissfully unaware in the middle of the mass of radiating flesh.

Before, while still restricted to the confines of the dream realm, Walpurgis could only rely on Mu'en's verbal descriptions to understand the goings-on in reality.

She knew that Mu'en considered Lin Jie to be strong, unfathomable even. But he was still just a human, and there was no doubt about it.

Walpurgis could see that he was still fundamentally a human and the alterations to his body only occurred later on.

Just like many non-human beings that wished to find a human shell for themselves, or how some creatures existed as humans in their juvenile stages of their lives...

As for what lay beneath... Walpurgis couldn't tell as well.

This was the only thing that bewildered her. No matter how she looked, this fellow was just a human.

Generally speaking, there should at least be some clues.

Silver was a standard 'misanthrope.' Her dislike for humans was so vile that describing it as contempt would be an understatement. In her eyes, humans were but puny insects.

All the covenants she made were with non-human creatures... which included ancient dragons, giants, elves, and others. But there

had never been humans.

This meant that she and Walpurgis, who was a ‘Philanthrope,’ weren’t on good terms and often at loggerheads.

However, Silver, who had always despised humans, had now made a covenant with Lin Jie, finally granting her a human anointed.

Was Lin Jie really that powerful he could change Silver’s personality, or was he in fact not a human but was simply keeping it well hidden?

Walpurgis’ eyes followed the iris flower vine, watching how it wrapped around Lin Jie’s finger and formed an intricate flower stem ring before the vine broke off and returned into the wall.

Lin Jie now had two rings, one on his left hand and the other on his right. Incidentally, both were on his ring finger.

The iris flower swayed a little, then turned to face Walpurgis, who was still standing at the entrance of the room with the door slightly ajar. The webbed mass of flesh around the room started to converge and encircled the stem of the iris flower, forming a tall, elegant meshed figure of a lady.

The seemingly glowing iris flower was now swaying beside the temple of this humanoid figure.

Though this humanoid figure was rather abstract and lacked facial features, Walpurgis knew that it was staring straight at her, an old acquaintance.

Of course, being found out was inevitable, and Walpurgis wasn’t too bothered by it. She was already aware of prior contact between Silver and Lin Jie and hence came to the conclusion that Silver also knew of her existence.

When they would cross paths was just a matter of time.

However, Walpurgis hadn’t anticipated two things happening.

First was the accidental change in the contractual ring’s ownership.

Then, when she was in the midst of retrieving it sneakily, she discovered Silver had also transferred her own covenant.

Walpurgis had even considered asking for Silver's help getting Lin Jie to return the ring. However, she never expected Silver to also give Lin Jie a ring as well...

It was as if she was intentionally trying to make her mad.

Glaring at the humanoid figure, Walpurgis muttered in a low voice, "You did this on purpose."

She kept an eye on Lin Jie the whole time, afraid of waking him up.

"Hehe."

Silver's delicate laughter echoed throughout the room, sounding as if the entire frightening mass of flesh was speaking.

The humanoid with the iris flower on her ear lifted up the hems of her skirt and gave a graceful curtsy.

"I tried asking for it back on your behalf, but he refused. How could you accuse me of doing it on purpose, what else could I possibly have done?"

If he didn't want to give it up, couldn't you have just taken it? Aren't you one of the four Primordial Witches? Why do you speak as though you are a weak woman whose every decision is governed by her man? Walpurgis thought to herself furiously.

The whole thing was already as clear as day.

Silver obviously intended for this. Her appearance here was definitely to thwart Walpurgis' plans. She wanted for Walpurgis' contractual ring to remain on Lin Jie so as to provide a better bargaining chip for her own anointed.

A covenant was a form of testament; seeking the blessings of a Primordial Witch also meant pledging allegiance to her and following her every command.

The mutual benefits that both parties received were of equivalence.

Since ages had passed, nobody knew how many anointed still remained. However, those that manage to withstand the test of time would surely be loyal devotees and powerful as well.

Silver had no humans within her anointed and hence had the idea of stealing from Walpurgis.

Oh Silver, how conniving you are,

Walpurgis grumbled to herself.

However, the situation wasn't ideal for her. Judging from how Silver was able to reside outside of the dream realm, surely she possessed more power than Walpurgis' current weak state. Moreover, there was still another unknown threat nearby in the form of a sleeping Lin Jie.

Possessing Mu'en had just been to sneakily steal the ring back, but now the entire plan had been thrown out of the window.

"Since he's already helped me reclaim the moon's authority, I'll call it even by letting him keep the ring," Walpurgis disclosed in an attempt to comfort herself

She shut her eyes and scoffed, "It's all a big hassle anyway, so I'll let him deal with this headache."

However, the fact remained that the covenant was still with him. In the future, her anointed would take his words as the words of Walpurgis.

For some strange reason, Walpurgis felt like she was being cheated on and even felt like she was obliged to cover the truth and allow the ones who committed the sin to walk freely...

The more she contemplated, the angrier Walpurgis got, and she decided she couldn't stay here for any longer.

She stomped and pulled at the door with all her might... but stopped halfway all of a sudden before gently pulling the door to a

close.

Behind her, Silver's faint chuckling could still be heard.

Prima Sandra was currently preparing a divination ceremony of the Night in secret.

Surveying the items placed on the table, she murmured eccentrically, "I will save you, Sister. Those from our clan have bad intentions and don't want you to return and not a single one of them can be trusted...

"Lady Walpurgis, who controls the Night, must have returned already. The shift in the sun and moon is definitely an omen. Now, only she can protect us both."

Prima's older sister was indeed Margaret Sandra, the Head of Medicine from the Truth Union, who had recently gone missing after being attacked.

All of the materials had been prepared and arranged on the table: vials of carefully refined elixirs sparkled with a charming brilliance and in the place of a crystal ball was an enchanted miniature moon dial made of meteoric iron.

The swishing elixirs in the vials reflected a shine on Prima's unassuming face. A pair of thick-rimmed glasses rested on her nose, and her lush black hair was clumped into a thick braid.

The shirt, coat, and trousers she wore were all of a men's style, and her hands were covered with thick, white industrial gloves.

A beret hung on the armrest of the chair beside, and had it been worn, it would be easy to mistake Prima for a short boy.

We are hosted novel, find us on google.

"Huu..." Prima exhaled sharply.

Having completed engraving the grooves on the spell circle, Prima

poured out the elixirs sequentially with steady hands and a hardened gaze.

The spell circle began to glow and a blurry image formed on the moon dial.

“Abiding by the ancient promise, Lady Walpurgis shall protect those who suffer in the Night. In return, we will pledge to you our loyalty and support.

“Please help me!”

Staring anxiously at the moon dial, Prima saw the blurry image shifting before finally displaying an image of a dilapidated bookstore.

The shadow needle on the moon dial was pointed to it.

Chapter 214: Meow

Chapter 214: Meow

A cold autumn wind was blowing throughout the whole of Norzin, creating a slight whistling in the hazy night.

Prima pulled her cloak that was whipping in the wind tighter. Her face was hidden under her hood and only the reflective sheen of her spectacles could be seen in the dark, making her seem all the more mysterious.

With the miniature moon dial in hand, she cautiously poured a drop of elixir onto the dial. A wispy mist instantly formed where the silvery medicine came into contact with the moon dial.

The dial glowed brilliantly, and the image of a needle appeared once again, pointing in the right direction.

Prima did a quick sweep of her surroundings cautiously, then proceeded to keep all the objects back into her cloak and quickly strode down the street.

Panting as she headed against the blowing wind, Prima's heart pounded with excitement. "This is the first time Walpurgis had properly answered her anointed since the Second Era. She has surely risen again; the extermination of the Church of the Dome's false god must've been her will!"

The Church of the Dome's evil nature and innumerable hidden scandals being exposed before ultimately being overthrown were already widespread news.

Moreover, apostles of the Sun's Faith had been disseminating the truth and Secret Rite Tower was fanning the flames. Even though Prima was largely ignorant to the on-goings around her due to her devotion in the research of arcane medicine, she too had become aware of the events that had occurred during this period.

The Church of the Dome had always suspended the beliefs of Walpurgis, the Witch who controlled the Night, and proclaiming the moon as the only God which had made anointed like Prima terribly uneasy.

However, the Church of the Dome had held exceptional power and repute while the strength of the anointed had been steadily weakening in contrast. This resulted in internal disputes amongst the anointed and they simply didn't have any opportunity to fight back.

The subversion of the Church of the Dome had greatly affected the various factions of Norzin. Transcendent groups like the Sandra Clan especially were greatly impacted by the change.

The rise of the Sun's Faith was akin to a divine intervention, and the sun replacing the moon was a significant omen.

This was practically Walpurgis announcing to her past followers that she had returned!

Yet, before the ever-devoted Sandra Clan could properly celebrate this, Margaret's disappearance after an ambush had thrown the entire clan into disarray.

Incidentally, she was also the vocal Sandra Clan representative who pushed for the preservation of the covenant.

A ripple led to huge waves, which the Sandra Clan found themselves being swept along...

Some even suggested that the disappearance of a loyal devotee of Walpurgis, Margaret, had inevitably proven the reawakening of Walpurgis to be a hoax and they should abolish the old traditions and search for a new protector.

A problem that had always been hidden under the surface had suddenly emerged.

If Margaret really met an adverse fate, the whole Sandra Clan would be flipped on its head.

Prima stopped at a corner and took out the moon dial once again for a divine orientation. Looking at the image of the old bookstore, she mumbled to herself, “I’ve never heard of this bookstore before... but Walpurgis, who controls the night, would never lie to her anointed. Since the covenant lies deep within our souls, the authenticity of this place must be true. This must be where her dream realm has descended.”

Prima had many guesses about the bookstore. Though it seemed ordinary and rather dilapidated, it was precisely such an appearance which gave rise to a mysterious aura that would make people wonder.

Perhaps, many secrets lie within this bookstore, and the entrance to Walpurgis’ hidden realm might just be behind those doors.

Maybe, there were other powerful anointed waiting in the bookstore for her arrival...

Whatever... Prima didn’t actually have a clear idea either.

This bookstore was far too ordinary without any defining features on its exterior. This place was starkly different from the divination forecast Prima envisaged. Hence, she could only make up various reasons in order to strengthen her belief.

After all, it was unknown how much power Walpurgis still retained, even if she had finally risen again, after being sealed and in slumber for thousands of years.

Clenching her fists, Prima took a deep breath and whispered the mantra her sister had always used to cheer herself up. “The will of Walpurgis to return to reality from the dream realm cannot be denied. Her greatness cannot be eroded by time. These foolish clan-mates have been blinded by the benefits they have received, yet they’ve all forgotten the promise we’ve made thousands of years ago. How dare they attempt to betray the Primordial and find another protector. These actions can only be described as short-sighted...”

“Haa...” sighed Prima dejectedly as she put away the moon dial and

elixir. “You were right, Sis, I should have learned to better interact with people instead of burying my head in experiments. Otherwise, I wouldn’t be in this situation with no one to ask for help.

“But... though you were great at socializing, how many people from the clan actually care for your safety and are scrambling to help you now?”

Prima might have been obsessed with research, but in truth, she had a clearer view of everyone else.

As she was continuing in her search for the bookstore, a voice sounded from above her.

“Prima, right? I believe that you no longer need to seek help from others... because we’ll be reuniting you with your elder sister shortly.”

Prima looked up at once and noticed a voluptuous figure standing on top of an electrical power line.

It was a tall, dark elf dressed in skin tight armor. Her dark skin was as delicate as a pearl, and her silvery hair had been fashioned into a high ponytail. Though she wore a mockful look, her eyes were full of murderous intent.

She spun a silver dagger in her hand, drawing arcs in the air with the cold gleaming blade.

A Dark Elf Stalker.

And she was of Pandemonium-rank!

“You... Who are you?! Were you the one who attacked my sister?! What have you done to her?!” sputtered Prima as she backtracked anxiously.

She hurriedly took out several elixir vials from within her cape, then realized to her horror that the elixir of invisibility she had poured onto her cape had already lost its effect!

Prima turned as white as a sheet.

She was only a researcher of arcane medicine and naturally didn't know how to fight. Facing a Pandemonium-rank transcendent on her own was basically a death sentence.

The dark elf flashed a contemptuous smile. "There's no need for you to know anything. All a dead person needs to do is lie down quietly."

With a flash, she disappeared from her original position.

Search for the original.

Prima instinctively shut her eyes as she let out a piercing scream. She immediately proceeded to shatter all of her elixir bottles, causing the elixirs to vaporize and mix as it rapidly diffused into the air.

"Damn it!"

The dark elf once again reappeared at the edge of the medicinal fog, retreating quickly with a sullen look on her face.

Once the fog touched the nearby walls and ground, they either rapidly corroded the terrain or froze it over as the chemical passed over, some even combusting spontaneously with an astonishing wide radius and causing the ground to collapse.

The intel never mentioned that the obscure younger sister of Margaret had potions of this level!

But... This was likely to be her very last resort.

The dark elf did a somersault and leapt to a high vantage point to see Prima scrambling away before continuing her chase.

As Prima ran, she made clumsy attempts to prevent her glasses from slipping off her face. Right now, she was on the verge of tears.

Chugging down a buffing elixir, she continued running in the direction shown by the moon dial.

Bookstore, bookstore... where the hell is the bookstore?

Fatigue from running started to set in. Suddenly, Prima felt a slight, brief chill behind her; a blade had nearly nicked her nape, causing goosebumps to rise all over her body. In the distance, an old building finally appeared in her muddled field of view.

A bookstore without signage, books on display behind a hazy window, and that bell on the door.

This was the place shown on the moon dial!

A glimmer of hope flashed before Prima's eyes as she increased her pace.

"Caught you, little mouse!" The voice of the dark elf accompanied by the sound of a blade slicing through air.

Schwing!

"Oof!" Even though Prima tried her hardest to dodge, she was eventually still struck on the shoulder by the dagger. Excruciating pain coursed through her body, causing her to break out in a cold sweat and momentarily lose control of her limbs.

Crash!

At the same time, the momentum made Prima roll forward twice, crashing the bookstore open and leaving a dent on it.

The dark elf then approached her, though the swaying of her enchanting figure seemed rather blurry in the eyes of Prima.

Her glasses had already been knocked off and she could only struggle toward the inside of the bookstore at this moment.

Thud!

The dark elf stomped her foot on Prima's palm, grinding the sharp heel of her shoe in. Though this made Prima want to cry out, she still gritted her teeth and made no sound.

"You were looking for this place? Who here can possibly help you? Or do you actually believe the Walpurgis you believe in will rise out

of nowhere to help you?” taunted the dark elf.

Meow~

A sudden meowing of a cat resounded through the bookstore.

The dark elf turned her head to see a white cat perched on the bookstore’s counter, just silently staring at her ominously.

Chapter 215: What Do You Mean What Bookstore?

Chapter 215: What Do You Mean What Bookstore?

“Meow~”

This snow-white cat looked rather chubby, almost resembling a big round ball from the way it sat. In a sense, it seemed quite innocent and cute.

With its head tilted to the side, the white cat watched the two trespassers with its large yellow eyes in a manner that could be deemed ‘adorable.’

But under the current circumstance, this movement appeared extremely menacing.

The dark elf stopped in her tracks and stared at the cat with a frown. She had a bad feeling about this.

It's just an ordinary cat... But why do I feel that something isn't right?

She then surveyed her surroundings. This bookstore seems... really ordinary. Yes, it's unremarkable; in fact, this bookstore even pales in comparison to normal bookstores.

There weren't any decorations or many furnishings, just rows upon rows of shelves filled to the brim with books. Rather than a bookstore, this seemed like a pure book depository.

There was no indication the owner of this bookstore had any desire to attract customers.

After a quick scan, the dark elf's gaze returned back to the counter. Till now, the cat was still wagging its tail, but it had jumped down the counter.

The counter-top seemed much emptier with its absence and had

nothing noteworthy as with the rest of the place.

Due to its apparently obese physique, the white cat's strides were unsteady as it wobbled toward the dark elf, purring as it did so.

The dark elf had the sudden urge to retreat, but she forcefully willed herself from doing so.

Squelch!

She reached down and pulled out the dagger embedded in Sandra's shoulder. The blade had been laced with poison, illustrated by the brilliant sheen of blue on the blood-stained blade.

"Ugh."

Prima groaned, her face as white as a sheet. Signs of the spreading poison were now evident; her forehead was riddled with beads of cold sweat, and bluish-green veins had appeared on her neck and were creeping upwards.

With her dagger in a reverse grip, the dark elf maintained a vigilant posture as it watched the cat saunter toward her.

Her mission was complete, and she could leave already.

However, the reputation she had built would've gone down the drain if anyone were to find out she had been scared off by a cat.

It's just a cat...

Taking in a deep breath, the dark elf's gaze turned fierce and a cold glow flashed across the dagger in her hands. In that split moment, aether had gathered on the blade, forming an extremely sharp edge.

A decisive blow was launched without a single sound.

The white cat in front of her stopped in its tracks momentarily before it was split into two. The area surrounding it received no damage and was untouched.

The force of the strike had been expertly regulated, displaying the

absolute might of a Pandemonium-rank.

“Phew...”

The dark elf heaved a sigh of relief. She withdrew her dagger, thinking to herself that this false alarm had been kinda funny.

It was just a cat.

She no longer paid any attention to Prima, whose struggles had gotten weaker with each passing moment. Turning around, she took out a hexagonal crystal and channeled some aether into it. A glowing outline appeared on the crystal before it promptly formed a communication array in the air.

Stalkers didn't use devices for communication as it made it too easy to be spied on. Although using a simple preset transmission crystal was primitive and consumed more aether, the risks that came along with it were lowered.

The voice on the other end connected quickly enough and asked, “Mission accomplished?”

The weakened Prima's eyes snapped wide open. This was a voice she had heard before and was in fact one she was very familiar with!

It was Jerome, who was a cousin of hers!

Of course... She gritted her teeth.

Of course, the people from her clan who preferred to break the covenant and find a new protector were behind this. They were the ones who had done something to her sister!

Furthermore, Jerome was also a member of the Truth Union. He had once competed with Margaret for the Head of Medicine position but lost. He must have held this grudge for a long time!

The dark elf nodded. “She's been struck by my poisoned dagger and is currently lying at my feet. Given her physicality, she will be taking her last breath within three minutes.”

“Very well,” the other party responded. “Humph, attempting to summon Walpurgis from the dream realm? Such behavior is simply foolish and dangerous; with Walpurgis asleep for thousands of years, who knows what sort of creature she’ll actually summon? She’s just as brainless as her sister!”

The lips of the dark elf twitched. “This doesn’t concern me. All you need to do is pay me. If you dare go back on this agreement, it will be your blood staining my blade next. Are we clear?”

“Naturally, if I were to renege on my words, the organizer of the current Blood Feast will personally deal with me to maintain their reputation even if you didn’t kill me yourself. You would at least believe in Blood Feast, right?”

“As long as you’re clear,” the dark elf sneered. “Speaking of which, that Walpurgis you all believe isn’t all that bright. Perhaps you should change your faith and believe in the Brood-mother, just like us.”

Jerome replied with a chuckle, “I have to kindly refuse. Prima’s attempts at summons and divinations were doomed to fail. I had already long foreseen this outcome, even if you didn’t tell me so.

“Walpurgis has been in deep slumber for thousands of years, how could she suddenly awaken now? Only fools like them would continue clinging on to their unwavering beliefs.”

Fiddling with the dropped moon dial on the ground using her heels, the dark elf replied nonchalantly, “No, in truth she seems to have succeeded, though the Primordial Witch led her to a crappy bookstore and straight to her death. Don’t you find that laughable?”

Prima was sprawled across the ground, her body growing numbingly cold. Upon hearing what the dark elf said, her fingers stopped twitching as an exhausted look of utter despair took over her face.

Has... Walpurgis really forsaken her anointed?

Using whatever strength she had left, she raised her head and stared

at the nothingness before her...

However, what she saw was two wriggling masses that used to be the white cat squirming and dividing. Its cat form had now 'disintegrated,' reduced into something that was seemingly a tangled mass of countless maggots. Tentacles wriggled ceaselessly at the base of its body, and at the same time, a large gap had opened in its center, where a yellow eyeball nearly the same size of its body was forming.

Prima was stunned; even on the brink of death, a sense of extreme hysteria ignited within her.

Above her, Jerome's laughter echoed from the transmission crystal. "Ha-ha-ha, this proves that our choice was right. These nitwits can finally see what their beliefs led to. Walpurgis is still nowhere to be seen... and a bookstore.

"Ha-ha-ha... wait!"

His laughter came to an abrupt stop as Jerome asked anxiously, "What bookstore?"

With a frown, the dark elf asked doubtfully, "What do you mean what bookstore? It's just a very ordinary one. This crappy bookstore doesn't even have a signboard and only has a bell on the door..."

Jerome was silent for two seconds before he let out a hoarse cry.

"RUN!!!"

"Huh?"

The dark elf was confused as she stared in bafflement at the transmission crystal in her hand, without a clue as to why her client had such a sudden outburst.

And as she stared at the crystal, she noticed the reflection on it — a mass of white tentacles with a giant eyeball at its center staring straight at her.

Before she could even turn around, the dark elf stalker was

promptly decapitated with a bite.

Her headless body followed shortly after as it was swallowed by the mass of white tentacles. After the sickening sounds of chewing stopped, the tentacles had once again shrunk back into the shape of a chubby white cat licking its paws.

“Meow... Burp~”

Chapter 216: Where The Hell Is My Door?!

Chapter 216: Where The Hell Is My Door?!

After releasing a satisfied burp, the white cat leaned over Prima with its mouth wide open and sniffed her. But then, after seemingly verifying something, it shut its mouth with slight dismay.

As it crouched down beside Prima, the white cat shook its head and suddenly realized it had forgotten to give itself eyes.

Pop! Pop!

Two eyeballs appeared in succession on its round white body and gradually adjusted to resemble normal cat eyes.

The cat bug christened 'Whitey' blinked and swung its tail like a whip before 'inserting' it into the pool of blood that had previously splattered onto the ground and sucked it dry.

Since there was no more meat, some soup would suffice...

Prima, who was still lying on the floor, struggled hard to retrieve an antidote hidden among the remaining few bottles of elixirs. Yet before she could even do so, she felt the last slivers of her life slipping away.

She tilted her head slightly, staring in a daze at the white cat before her, whose 'fur' glowed faintly like a moonbeam. As the lights in her eyes gradually faded, the corners of her lips raised slightly.

Great, Walpurgis who controls the night... She knew... She's never abandoned us...

In her fuzzy field of view, a blurry figure of a man suddenly appeared on top of the stars in the far corner. As her eyes closed and opened once more, a magnified face she had never seen before

now appeared in front of her.

She felt a peculiar sense of affinity from this young, raven-haired and onyx-eyed man, and Prima could swear this wasn't a hallucination caused by imminent death.

She could feel a familiarity that reached the depths of her soul, making her feel as if she had returned back to the warm and reassuring environment of her mother's womb. This sense of warmth made Prima subconsciously relax.

Before her vision turned completely dark, she could make out the ring sitting on the young man's pale finger.

"Walpurgis..."

Though the lips of the young lady parted, no sound came out.

Lin Jie trampled down the stairs, still in his pajamas. At first, he had still been drowsy, but the sight of the scene on the first floor instantly sobered him up.

His first reaction was...

"Where the hell is my door?!!

"I still had a huge door before I went to bed! Why has it suddenly gone missing???"

He was now completely wide awake.

Confusion was written all over Lin Jie's face as he looked at his doorway, which could now be regarded as a template burglary crime scene.

Pieces of splintered wood littered the floor, and there were fragments and dust all sprinkled messily all over the place. Furthermore, on the door that had its hinges knocked off was a large dent in its center.

But more importantly was the lady lying on the ground — despite the rather manly attire that could be seen under her messed-up cloak, her hairstyle at least gave away her gender.

Anyone could tell she didn't have long to live given the bluish tinge growing on her mouth and nose, as well as her darkening forehead.

This made Lin Jie realize something serious had happened.

Has a murder had taken place at the doorway of my bookstore in the middle of the night?!

With his face paling, Lin Jie quickened his pace and went to help prop the lady up. At the same time, he also shooed Whitey aside. Whitey who 'contributed nothing and was just being nosy.'

"Me-ow..."

The white cat, who had wanted to show its affection but was instead chased away, turned and faced a corner to sulk.

Lin Jie realized the situation was grim when he came into contact with Prima's shoulders. A sticky liquid coated his hands, and upon closer inspection, was identified as blood.

This lady was facing a situation way more severe than Mu'en when she had shown up injured; she wasn't just losing blood but had been poisoned as well!

Moreover, this poison was unusual. Prima's entire body had started to swell which meant that she was in grave danger.

In his moment of panic, he was also distracted by something else.
Where is Mu'en?

Didn't Mu'en recently help Joseph to install a prosthetic arm or something? That means she's at least at the level of a master in terms of Biology, Medicine, and other related fields. If only she was here now... but this lady will most likely die if I were to head upstairs to wake Mu'en up!

In actuality, Mu'en was currently deep in slumber and couldn't be

woken up because of the mental strain of Walpurgis' possession.

“Ugh...”

Lin Jie looked down and discovered the moribund Prima straining to keep her eyes open as if trying to say something. Her head was slightly tilted up and there was a teary sheen in her eyes as she looked up at him with a peaceful and trusting expression.

Boss Lin immediately felt his heart become heavy. This child believed in him, he had to save her!

_ Support us at hosted novel _

Patting her on the back, he whispered, “Don’t you worry, you will not die.”

Lin Jie reached out his hand that was covered in Prima’s blood and used a finger to draw a sigil on her forehead. He then closed his eyes and grasped the free-floating aether present in the dream realm, and through the connection of both his finger and sigil, formed a bridge to link his soul and hers.

It was fortunate that he had just been asking Silver for advice in the dream realm and had managed to learn the ‘Blood Curse, Dying Blood Transfer’ spell.

Most of the spells recorded within the human skin book were cruel and evil, though if used in a proper way could actually bring about positive effects worth far more.

And if ‘necromancy’ was used at a suitable timing, it could save a person’s life in a dangerous situation!

A person who was dying but not yet dead, fresh blood which hadn’t yet lost its life-force. The conditions to cast the spell were fulfilled.

Substitute the soul.

Control the body.

Extend the lifespan.

When Lin Jie reopened his eyes, they were now completely flushed black. Only a blood-red flame could be seen in the farthest depths. This was the flame of Prima's soul.

Lin Jie faintly felt like he was a tentacled monster. Soul, an incorporeal essence, was currently 'flowing' through Lin Jie's arm and into Prima's body.

Following the circulatory system, it then spread to her entire body, eventually taking over Prima's already weakened will and controlling her.

Of course, as Lin Jie took control of Prima's mind, he could feel his vision and other senses being split in two. However, the split wasn't an equivalent one. He still had a dominant control over one of the bodies, while the other was sluggish in response, akin to a signal with bad delay. However, he didn't have much of a problem controlling both.

On top of this, he could even vaguely pick up some of the thoughts Prima had as she was dying.

"Antidote?"

Lin Jie had managed to pick up a useful piece of information. He was then momentarily elated to find out that Prima's hand had been digging for something in her cloak and had remained in that position.

He had originally planned to prolong her life for a while longer so that he could go up and call for Mu'en.

But now, there was a ready-made solution.

Lin Jie controlled Prima's hand to take out the antidote and drink it while simultaneously controlling his own body to fetch a first aid kit and expertly stop Prima's bleeding and treat her wounds.

Lin Jie multi-tasked efficiently with one mind. Thanks to the initial period where he had taken care of Mu'en, he was now a first-aid master of dealing with serious injuries.

“Phew...”

Lin Jie exhaled as he placed Prima on the recliner and relinquished his control.

As he shifted his gaze, Lin Jie was met with a pair of bright, black eyes. It appeared that Prima had already regained her consciousness after consuming the antidote.

She had clearly felt her soul being invaded, bound, and controlled. It was an immense force she couldn't oppose, just like her father teaching her to walk when she was a child; broad shoulders and arms leaned against her body, and strong arms guiding her in a certain direction.

Even her very own blood obeyed every command.

There was also the ring; the ring which made her very core tremble. The one before her was definitely Walpurgis... *Wait a minute, why is it a male?*

Prima suddenly found herself dumbfounded.

“You are awake?” Lin Jie asked, waving his palm in front of Prima's face.

Right now, all that she could focus on was the silver ring on his ring finger.

“Not yet? How about looking at that door and trying to recall what happened.”

Lin Jie pointed at the damaged door before exasperating sullenly, “The Church of the Dome matter only just resolved and I've to deal with this kind of situation again. Is this Norzin or Gotham City?!”

“Whoever smashed the door better watch out. I will make them pay!”

Chapter 217: Medicinal Herbs: A Compendium

Chapter 217: Medicinal Herbs: A Compendium

Lin Jie was livid.

He had been sleeping soundly and had a pretty lady teaching him spells in his dream. Yet, this sweet dream of his was disrupted by a loud bang, instantly waking him up. Upon heading downstairs, he had found the door to his store missing.

Besides having his door gone, a possible murder had also occurred on the premises, with the murderer disappearing without a trace and only the victim left behind.

How could anyone possibly accept such a thing happening to them?

Putting aside the vile wrongdoings of the assailant first, Lin Jie would very much rather get justice deserved for the door that had been with him for three years.

Prima was slightly stunned and subconsciously glanced at the ‘cat’ which was still sulking beside the doorway... Referring to it as a cat was for simplicity’s sake.

As for the assailant... wasn’t she eaten up by it?

If the cause was viewed literally, the person responsible for smashing the door was Prima.

Because the inertia she had when running, coupled with the swing of the dagger, had made her crash into the door, not only smashing it off its hinges but also leaving behind a big dent.

However, the root cause was still the result of the assailant’s assault, hence the true culprit was without a doubt the dark elf stalker.

Still, the young man before her continued to question the identity of the ‘culprit.’

With more thought, one could tell that this wasn’t a case of asking the obvious but a question with an underlying implication.

Prima’s mind quickly went to work as she recalled everything that occurred before she lost consciousness. And in an instant, she figured out what was going on!

The dark elf was hired to kill Prima; in other words, she technically wasn’t the root cause either and merely an ‘instrument’ being manipulated by someone else. Therefore, the true ‘culprit’ would be the client who hired her.

In this case, the aforementioned client would be Jerome and his fellow clan-mates who wished to betray Walpurgis!

Furthermore, the young man had also mentioned the Church of the Dome which directly coincided with her sister’s predicament.

In this sense, even if he wasn’t Walpurgis, he would at least be an emissary or an envoy of sorts... The divination had ultimately led Prima here. Unless... this was Walpurgis’ intention?

Walpurgis, who controlled the Night, hadn’t abandoned her anointed after all!

During the previous dialogue, Jerome had immediately warned the dark elf stalker to run after hearing about the bookstore. Could the young man before her eyes be some reputed powerhouse that even Jerome was fearful of?

With the help of someone this strong, Sis will be fine!

Prima’s heart started to pound loudly, and a strange blush reappeared on her pale face from excitement.

“Thank you so much for saving me...” she said cautiously.

Lin Jie instantly interrupted her by raising Prima’s hand that held the empty vial of the antidote. With a deadpan expression, he said,

“It wasn’t me who saved you, you did it yourself. All I did was help you clean and bandage your wound.”

He reached out to pat the young lady’s head, wiping away the sigil he had drawn on her forehead with fresh blood and leaving no trace behind.

Spells and such... cannot be revealed.

“...”

The warm palm on her head, the empty vial in her hand, and Lin Jie’s serious expression; all of it made her nose itch.

She was fully aware of what had happened just now, and she was certain that Lin Jie definitely knew that she was aware of this.

He had obviously saved her yet insisted on saying that she saved herself. This was a recognition of her hard work and perseverance, recognition for the elixirs she made!

Besides Prima’s older sister, no one else had ever acknowledged her...

A truly kind and benevolent emissary!

Drunk on the recognition she had received, Prima suddenly became aware of the skin contact between her and this unfamiliar young man.

Blushing so hard, she desperately waved her hands and squeaked in a high-pitched voice, “Non-nonsense! I-If you weren’t here, I would’ve d-definitely perished by now. He-Hence I still have to thank you! Thank you so much!”

This pitiful girl had prolonged in-exposure to human contact, choosing to be a recluse and only concerning herself with research of elixirs. It could even be said that she was ‘isolated from the world.’

Besides Margaret, she barely even got within 50 meters of other people, especially men.

Now, being petted like a cat made her anxiously attempt to shrink back, like a mimosa leaf closing up from just a touch.

“Slow down, why don’t you first tell me what happened...”

Lin Jie withdrew his hand seeing how disorganized and incoherent Prima was and continued with resignation, “Never-mind, let me ask the questions and you to answer them. Try to be as simple and straightforward as possible.”

Prima nodded.

Originally, Lin Jie wanted to assume his usual ‘Commander Ikari’s iconic pose.’ But, after realizing his hand was still covered in blood, he assumed another pose by casually placing his elbow on his knee.

“What’s your name? And your identity?” he asked after some thought.

“Prima, Prima Sandra,” Prima replied earnestly in sequence. “I am the second daughter of the second son of the current head of Sandra Clan. My older sister, Margaret, is the Head of Medicine at the Truth Union.”

Lin Jie gave some thought before promptly replying, “I’m Lin Jie, the owner of this bookstore.”

Ah, she’s from the Sandra Clan... yet another one from a noble family appears. At least it isn’t the heiress this time but a poor thing that’s been cast aside and seemingly even being targeted.

Of course, the reason Lin Jie knew about this clan wasn’t because he was well-informed, but rather, it was because ‘Sandra Pharmaceutical’ was very well known despite the clan’s attempt at keeping a low profile. Lin Jie had even heard some gossip regarding them before.

It was an extremely profitable enterprise that had collaborated with the Ash Chamber Commerce for a long time, mainly providing high quality and expensive medicine to many different drugstores, hospitals, and even nobles.

With this, the reason why Prima had an antidote on her could now be easily explained.

She was born into this clan and was even a pharmacist herself.

Oh, she specifically mentioned her sister. It's likely that she has something to do with this incident.

Thus, he proceeded to ask, "Your sister Margaret; she's probably the reason why you were targeted."

Prima bit her lip and nodded. "She went missing after being attacked. This is definitely the work of Jerome and his group. They wish to remove all obstacles in their way for their own benefit.

"I don't know what has happened to her now, but the situation must be dire! I am not sure of the conflict within the clan, but... but I must save my sister!"

Lin Jie thought to himself, *I also don't know anything about the internal conflict within your clan... You people from the upper class really are of a different level... ambushes, assassinations, and whatnot.*

But... that's not the point here. Most importantly, my door was destroyed!

"So the mastermind behind your recent assassination was Jerome and his associates, am I correct?" Lin Jie flashed a kind smile as he continued, "Which means, they were the ones who destroyed my door."

Sensing the change in demeanor of the young man before her, Prima gulped nervously and proceeded to nod her head excessively.

"Alright, I have a working partnership with the Truth Union. Let's start the investigation from there."

Lin Jie stood up and rubbed away the dried blood on his hands. "You can go ahead and lie down first and wait for my assistant to wake up. Oh... looks like you can't really go back either. I guess you can share a room with her.

“For now...” Lin Jie looked around, then proceeded to retrieve a book from the shelf.

“Oh, since there isn’t any entertainment in the store, you can read this book if you get bored.”

After giving it some thought, Boss Lin presumed her to be a studious girl who would prefer books with more technical content. And having put her identity into consideration, he finally chose a book by the title of ***Medicinal Herbs: A Compendium***.

Hopefully, a book this thick can help Prima pass her time, Lin Jie thought.

Chapter 218: Primordial Tome Of Potions

Chapter 218: Primordial Tome of Potions

Prima accepted the book blankly, zoning out and staring at Lin Jie's back as he went up the stairs.

You can read a book to pass the time...

His manner of speech sounded like how one would talk to a child.

With the book in hand, Prima gave a long sigh. She then glanced cautiously at the chubby white cat that was sulking in the corner, drawing circles in the air with its tail.

The innocent and distressed manner of the cat made it hard to imagine how it had instantly finished off a Pandemonium-rank just now.

The dark elf stalker had called Prima a little mouse, but who would have thought she was the 'mouse' that was caught by a cat.

As she recalled the intense situation she faced this night, Prima could barely process what had happened.

Before all this, she was just a nerd with her head buried in mountains of medicinal research. She was always under the care of her older sister, living a dull but peaceful life. Never had she imagined she would one day be put in a dire life-and-death situation.

Just a little more and her life would have ended here.

Had she not made it to the bookstore, the dark elf stalker would've easily covered up her tracks and Prima wouldn't have found out the mastermind behind this assassination attempt.

"I'm still too weak..."

Pursing her lips, Prima wrapped her palm around the spine of the book.

This was the very first time she had ever felt the desire for power. If just comparing her medicinal knowledge in concocting elixirs, Prima would perhaps feel proud to be at the very top among her peers.

However, the enemies she was now facing weren't close to her age. Jerome was the one leading his bunch of traitors in planning a conspiracy against the clan. Prima wouldn't be competing with him in terms of medicinal knowledge, but in a full-on fight that would make the difference between life and death!

Just like what happened previously, all her elixirs could only do was delay the Pandemonium-rank dark elf stalker and cause some minor inconveniences.

Prima had confidence in the prowess of her theoretical knowledge of elixirs.

With the right calculations, if these elixirs were to be used appropriately, dealing with or even killing a Pandemonium-rank was entirely possible.

Although, this was only possible in theory...

Reality had already shown the results. When truly facing a Pandemonium-rank, Prima couldn't even properly retrieve her elixir bottles and was in utter disarray the whole time. Could there be anything else said about her fighting skills?

I want to be stronger!

This thought was as clear as day in the Prima's mind.

Though it immediately deflated after. Becoming stronger wasn't that easy of a task.

All she could do now was to read the book...

Dejectedly, she lifted the book, then froze.

The book in her hands wasn't what she had expected.

A mysterious and ancient aura emanated from the cobalt blue book, and drawn on the thick, uneven cover was a herb Prima had never seen before. In a bronze text, the words written, Primordial ***Tome of Potions*** .

"Primordial Tome of Potions..." muttered Prima. As a master of elixirs herself, she felt a sense of both shock and awe just looking at it.

Her heart pounded rapidly. The Sandra Clan was already the oldest clan specializing in arcanum medicine within Norzin, yet she had never heard of such a book.

It was as if a voice in the dark was telling her— *everything you've ever wanted to pursue in life lies in this book.*

The only ones who held the title of 'Primordial' were none other than the Four Primordial Witches themselves.

What did this mean?

The Four Primordial Witches were once the symbols of ultimate power. Did it mean that this book before her also represented the strongest book on elixirs ever?

Prima was stunned; this book had merely been given to her by Lin Jie!

Unless... the owner of the bookstore had already foreseen her wish to become stronger and gave the appropriate methods directly to her?!

Without a doubt, this act by the bookstore owner must be the will of Walpurgis!

With a sense of excitement, Prima flipped the book open and was met with dense rows of introductory text.

Consternation and fascination washed over her.

This book contained a detailed classification of the form, origin, attributes, function, harvesting methods, and more of elixir ingredients. Sorted in an organized and systemized manner, this book was simply an incredible encyclopedia of arcanum medicine.

Just this fact alone meant that this book had already surpassed all the other forms of literature on arcanum medicine that Prima had ever read.

Even more exciting was the various elixir and potion formulas documented inside!

“So it can be done like this...

“My god, this is incredible...

“Ugh, using a baby’s placenta to synthesize elixirs, how ominous and unsettling... No, that’s not the point. Synthesizing elixirs requires rationality, logic, and legitimacy. I should be more concerned about the principle and function behind such an elixir.

“And this, I’ve never seen this herb before. Is there really a herb like this in the world? How intriguing...”

Unknowingly, Prima continued flipping page after page, her face displaying a whole range of expressions from excitement, fear, to enthusiasm. Finally, she came to a stop at one page and eyed it with skepticism.

On the page was a lifelike drawing of a herb, one which Prima had never seen before.

In her bewilderment, Prima suddenly noticed the leaf of the herb moving ever so slightly.

...Am I imagining things?

Blinking hard several times, Prima saw the herb actually ‘grow’ out directly from the book. The illustration had peeled off the page and turned into an unidentified living plant.

This was a... living book!

All of the elixir ingredients in the book were alive!

Prima's hands holding onto the book started trembling slightly. She suddenly heard footsteps coming down the staircase and slammed the book shut with a jolt.

She tilted her head in that direction and saw Lin Jie leading a girl with a vacant look down the stairs.

Lin Jie brought Mu'en over to a chair by the side of the recliner and gently pressed down her shoulders to force her to sit.

"This is Prima, you can ask her for the specifics later. In any case, she's the one I just saved and will be temporarily staying with us here at the store. Do get along with her," he said.

Mu'en blinked, took a look at Prima, and instantly understood—this must be an anointed that had found her way here.

With a nod, she replied, "I will."

Satisfied, Lin Jie gave his reliable assistant a pat on the shoulder and proceeded to go fix the door.

Prima stared fixedly at Mu'en and was utterly stunned.

As an anointed, Walpurgis' aura was embedded deep within Prima's soul, allowing her to instantly sense that this young girl... had an aura similar to Walpurgis!

No, it was Walpurgis' aura!

Wait. If this person is the true Walpurgis...

Lin Jie had previously told Prima that she would 'share a room as his assistant,' and the assistant he was referring to was none other than Mu'en.

Which also meant that he wasn't an emissary of Walpurgis.

On the contrary, it was Walpurgis who was his assistant... A Primordial Witch was his assistant!

Prima's brain experienced a system malfunction.

She felt that her entire perspective of everything had been completely reshaped.

At the same time, Jerome, who had lost contact with his contracted dark elf stalker was now pacing around anxiously.

“How could this be, how does Prima have a connection with that bookstore?

“What do we do now?

“Even the Aether Annihilation Cannon was destroyed previously...”

Chapter 219: Scapegoat

Chapter 219: Scapegoat

Jerome's eyebrows were tightly scrunched up and he was sweating profusely as he paced back and forth in his room apprehensively.

His appearance was standard of someone from the upper class—shiny slick hair, a wispy mustache with two long, thin ends, dressed in a tidy, extravagant suit with a rimless monocle to top it off.

However, his hurried pacing and nervous rubbing of his hands made him look more like a headless fly.

Jerome's expressions were unpredictable as he looked down at the dimmed messenger crystal from time to time, muttering to himself incessantly.

“From what I last saw in the crystal, it wasn't the bookstore owner that did it himself. But now, the question is, what is his actual relationship with Prima and why would he help her?”

“Prima had never been down that street before, so she couldn't be a patron of the bookstore. The bookstore owner has no reason...

“Wait, damn it! What did the dark elf just say? She couldn't have sent Prima flying into the bookstore, could she?! That would be getting me into trouble!

“If that's the case, then I have completely offended that person...”

Jerome's face was now an ashen gray as he ruffled his well-kept hair with trembling hands.

As a member of the Truth Union, the memory of the operation to deal with the rain god some months ago was still fresh in his mind. That massive battle ultimately evolved into a fight of gods, and thereafter, the Aetheric Annihilation Cannon was also destroyed...

It was unforgettable for anyone present at the scene, and it would

probably haunt them for the rest of their lives.

For Jerome, this incident provided him with another awakening.

Because, it was only by riding on the success of that operation had he truly become a core member of the powerful organization known as the 'Path of the Flaming Sword.'

A core member was someone who received substantial backing, similar to Zukaiku or Rodney, whereby they could easily maintain two-way contact with the organization at any time.

One the other hand, the now deceased Heris, former leader of White Wolf, was only a lower-level member, who could only passively receive orders.

As an apothecarist who was relatively weak in combat power, Jerome only got to where he was today by relying almost solely on his 'intelligence and scheming.'

Jerome stopped grabbing his hair and calmed himself down. However, a sinister expression flashed across his face as he growled through gritted teeth, "Why should I be afraid... He is undoubtedly strong, but I have the Path of the Flaming Sword backing me. A Supreme-rank like Rodney is merely a piece of trash who got everything handed to him by the Path of the Flaming Sword. If it were me, I would've performed much better."

Both Rodney and Zukaiku were six feet under now, but this only meant they weren't smart enough and weren't of value.

To still fail after receiving so much resources from the Path of the Flaming Sword only further proved their personal incompetence.

Having been undercover within the Truth Union for an extended duration in the Truth Union, Jerome had managed to put a vice-chairman out of commission and under observation for a few months. He even managed to remain undetected through the few weeks of hectic investigation to find the mole done by the said vice-chairman.

"I've worked hard for so long, how can I just give up now!"

Jerome's eyes flashed with malevolence. After pondering some more, he strode over a table and pressed the button located under it.

Droom...

A faint rumble of cogs turning could be heard as a bookshelf shifted to the side, revealing a whole of bottles and containers containing elixirs of various colors and forms.

Jerome reached out his hand and selected a few bottles which he added to a mixing device hidden within his sleeves.

These elixirs were just semi-finished products, only a rough mix of several ingredients. Even in the eyes of other apothecaries, these were just harmless and common test products.

However, when mixed together, a powerful and entrancing hypnotic potion would be made.

Jerome named this concoction 'Spiritual Touch.'

He had already tested it on more than ten people, and it allowed him to control Pandemonium-ranks without any restrictions.

The dark elf stalker was one of such test subjects. Jerome had also sprayed a mist of 'Spiritual Touch' on her, which misguided her to believe that this undertaking of hers was a transaction of Blood Feast's.

But in truth, Blood Feast had temporarily ceased all large-scale operations after the founder, Zuikaku, had been captured. The only thing going on now was the internal power struggle within the top hierarchy of Blood Feast.

However, this was all in vain, for the Path of the Flaming Sword would soon send someone to take over.

Hence his deal with the dark elf was a falsehood from the very start.

"My dear vice-chairman Andrew, it's all up to you now," uttered

Jerome as he broke into a sinister smile while stroking his tiny mustache. “In the end, you’ll become my scapegoat.

“After all... You have more disputes with him than an insignificant character like me.”

Dwellings in the Central District were all classified according to the alphabet.

Starting from the center with ‘A’ and ending at the outer skirt with ‘Z,’ houses closer to the center were occupied by residents of higher status.

Of course, this status could be anything ranging from money, power, and popularity.

As for the nobles without any real power, those with common sense would’ve already sold their ancestral homes and moved out to the outer regions. Those that still clung onto the glory of their past lineage would get by rather miserably.

In order to make a desperate attempt to maintain a modest front, they would have to pay for a large number of servants as well as expensive daily necessities. Such an unsustainable manner of living was bound to catch up to them eventually.

In the beginning, they would need to rely on help from ‘friends’ around them. Next, they would smile their way into borrowing money before finally spiraling into a tragedy of un-payable debt...

A once feared noble clan would be completely reduced to a mere insignificance, with their dignified blood-line being the last and only article of value. The only way of repaying their debts was sending their female clan members to the chopping block, disguised as regularly held banquets.

Eventually, such a clan would have no choice but to commit mass suicide via poisoning, turning into a laughingstock passed on by word of mouth between the residents of the Central District.

Of course, when these dark secrets were removed from the equation, the affluence and extravagance of the Central District would no doubt be attractive to many.

The lifelong dreams of most ordinary Upper District residents would most likely be to own a property in the outskirts of the Central District.

Naturally, because he held a high position of vice-chairman in the Truth Union, as well as being of noble blood, Andrew resided in the Central District.

His address was B45.

“Jerome’s visiting?” Seated behind a wide table, Andrew frowned slightly when his servant reported this to him.

He recalled that Jerome, a Deputy Head of Medicine, used to be rivals with the now-missing Margaret despite being distant relatives. However, he was being unusually low-key now that she had gone missing. In fact, Jerome had even rejected his goal and gave up the position of Head of Medicine to another Deputy Head.

Making it appear that as a senior in the clan, the disappearance of Margaret had left him disconsolate and unable to put his heart into the matters of the Medical Department.

This seemed like a pretty innovative way to avoid suspicion.

But the question was... Why was Jerome calling on him at such a time?

Ever since the battle with the rain god, Andrew’s status within the Truth Union had been in free fall.

Previously, Andrew had sent that unhinged bunch of ‘Truth-seekers’ to investigate the bookstore. However, when he started to have second thoughts about the operation and retracted the order, he discovered that it was intercepted and the original order was carried out anonymously, which made him aware of the existence of a mole around him.

Andrew, however, didn't believe that his trusted aides that were in the know would possibly betray him.

From various indications, this mole seemed to be everywhere at once, affecting the whole Truth Union despite having no form.

In addition, the investigation done using aetheric monitoring yielded no results.

Andrew had already come up with his own assumption.

It wasn't that there were many moles, but rather, this mole could control others...

_ Support us at hosted novel _

Chapter 220: I Should Visit The Bookstore

Chapter 220: I Should Visit The Bookstore

Andrew's gaze remained fixed on the study table before him as he pondered for some time. Finally, with a twinkling of his eyes, he then nodded. "Got it. Please inform him that I am still attending to some issues and have him wait for me in the hall."

"Yes, Master." The servant immediately took his leave respectfully.

Andrew was 70% certain his assumption was right, just that he had no solid evidence.

He had decided to stay at home during this period due to him being placed under surveillance and having a portion of his authority suspended. During this time, he had gathered the entry and exit records of all Truth Union personnel.

As he couldn't trust those around him, Andrew had even retrieved the records from multiple sources before piecing it together and sorting it all by himself.

After understanding the movements of all personnel during this period, a relatively clear network was slowly becoming apparent. From within, Andrew could pick up a few vague clues.

Currently, he had already made a list of possible moles and wanted to carry out further investigation. However, this wasn't possible yet with him being placed under surveillance.

Andrew even suspected he had been on the end of some influence with regards to his thought processes previously.

Otherwise, he would never hastily attack the phantom of Candela that was emerging into reality after the battle with the rain god.

Ultimately, such a decision had made the Truth Union incur losses, as well as thoroughly offend the bookstore owner.

With regard to the series of actions Andrew had taken...

If one were to describe his state at the time, 'flummoxed' would be a suitable word.

Now that Andrew was given time alone to think, he realized that there was a disconnect between his own thought processes at that time.

While he might have status and a distinguished background, Andrew still relied on his own strength to slowly climb his way up to the position of vice-chairman. He had never once made a grave mistake in all these years, yet he had messed up at that one crucial moment.

Did that make any sense?

Andrew certainly hadn't felt anything was wrong at that point in time.

"Surely someone at that time came into contact with me either directly or indirectly, and somehow influenced me.

"And this person is also the very same person sabotaging the Truth Union's monitoring of Norzin and also the one who intercepted my command and prevented it from being sent out.

"There definitely is someone who meets these conditions via contact with relevant personnel while also having an alibi for being absent from the scene to avoid suspicion.

"But I still haven't found who this person is..."

Andrew couldn't help but touch his receding hairline, feeling that his charms that once wouldn't fade with age was now being compromised. "If I could use the aether surveillance network, things would've been much more convenient."

However during that period, even the data of the aether

surveillance network had also been tampered with, resulting in the machine becoming completely unreliable.

“Why would Jerome come and seek me out all of a sudden? We didn’t even have much interaction in the past.

“Is this about Margaret? Or is this another... In any case, he’s definitely a suspect too.”

At this moment, enlightenment flashed across his mind like a bolt of lightning, splitting the clouded confusion he originally had.

The papers denoting the entry and exit routes of all employees were already imprinted on his mind. A line representing the route Jerome had taken now seemed to jump out, peeling off the paper and standing out from the rest.

Andrew froze in place as his eyes narrowed. The quill in his hand was now waving involuntarily as he paid no mind to the smudges forming on the paper in his haste to draw the lines.

“Here... Here, he came into contact with the foreman of the aether surveillance network on this day, though it was only a mere brush of the shoulder. He had also stopped by for a while beside the person who gave out orders. As for me... He had once helped me deliver beauty elixirs to my lover Suzanne!”

Bang!

Andrew slammed his palms on the table with a grave look on his face. Staring intensely at the messily drawn diagram of lines, he gritted at his teeth. “Of course! It wasn’t done by him in person, but by the couriers of the Sandra Clan. However as a member of the Sandra Clan, Jerome could’ve substituted in on the sly!”

There’s something wrong with those elixirs!

Andrew had a hunch he had been under the influence of those elixirs, which resulted in his previous actions being controlled and manipulated!

Jerome was the mole! [*freewebnovel.com*]

“So, what does he have in mind for me with his current visit?”

Andrew looked toward the door of his study, almost as if he could see the waiting Jerome behind the door.

Andrew could vaguely imagine how Jerome had thought himself to be the hunter and Andrew to be the prey before he came.

At this point, Jerome must have been delighted thinking his superior was being toyed with in the palm of his hand.

Only, things were different now.

The role of the hunter and prey had now been reversed.

However, Andrew didn't intend to immediately expose Jerome and bring him to justice. He still lacked substantial evidence to prove Jerome's wrongdoings, and doing so would give the game away.

Surely there was someone hidden pulling the strings behind Jerome.

For now, Andrew needed to beat Jerome at his own game.

He knew the bookstore owner's behavioral logic. As long as he could become a patron of the bookstore, he would be able to earn the favor of the bookstore owner...

Indeed, Andrew now wanted to seek the help of the bookstore owner!

After waiting in the hall for 20 minutes, Jerome finally saw the long overdue Andrew.

Andrew extended a hand and chuckled, “My apologies for having kept you waiting. I was held up by some matters.”

“It's fine. It's my honor to await your arrival in your hall.” Jerome stood up and shook Andrew's hand while flattering him in a not-so-subtle way.

He also took the chance to take measure of Andrew who hadn't been in the public eye for quite some time.

After this period of setbacks, the vice-president of the Truth Union no longer had that assured air of self-confidence. He seemed to have aged another 10 years, though this was technically more accurate appearance-wise.

But... it would be better this way.

With this, people would be more inclined to believe Andrew couldn't withstand his own failures and opted the easy way by killing himself.

Jerome smiled respectfully to express his reverence for Vice-chairman Andrew as well as to show slight understanding for the plight of the vice-chairman.

But in truth, he was secretly releasing his elixir.

The two were still locked in a handshake.

It is done, thought Jerome to himself.

Akin to a devil's whisper, he then proceeded to continuously inject underlying hints into the conversation.

"Why don't you go and prove yourself?"

"This bookstore owner actually doesn't have much power. After summoning the spirit of Candela and crossing paths with the Waning Crescent Apostle, he hasn't actually done anything else. In fact, he had never personally dealt with any situation. This only further proves that it is just a fluke!"

"His whole existence is just a wild card and a threat to the entire Norzin and the Truth Union. The bookstore ought to be eradicated!"

"You should be shining under the spotlight of the Truth Union, not suspended and misunderstood like you are now. If only you can kill off that evil bookstore owner, you'll definitely be able to regain all

that you've lost..."

Andrew closed his eyes and muttered, "You're right, I should visit the bookstore."

Chapter 221: Lin Jie's Followers

Chapter 221: Lin Jie's Followers

"I will now bring all of you to see the author of the book, the great being who preaches our gospel," said Wilde as he opened the door, addressing the bunch who were currently studying Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies.

The few people in the room immediately stopped what they were doing and respectfully saluted Wilde, "Sir Faceless."

Wilde's eyes swept the room before he walked past several in turn to examine the results of their study. After a while, he nodded. "Looks like you've all reached a level of understanding from studying the gospel. Your piety will surely be felt by Mr. Lin."

A youth in the center was the first to speak up excitedly, "We still only have a very shallow understanding and need to put in much more effort. The contents are all profound and intriguing. I've managed to benefit a lot from just reading a few lines... The strength and wisdom of Mr. Lin is almost impossible to describe with words.

"However we all wish to dedicate our entire lives to the great and all-knowing Lord. We will get close to him using all our means and become his loyal servants!"

His eyes burned with adoration and fanaticism as he said all this.

It was nearly impossible to imagine that this bunch were among the group of Blood Feast members ridiculing Grady in front of the disguised Wilde just a few days earlier.

In contrast, they almost seemed like different people now.

'Night Falcon' was now a fortunate member of the Corpse

Devouring Sect that had chosen the right decision to follow the leadership of the ‘Faceless Black-scaled Man.’

He was once an extremely arrogant elite Pandemonium-rank hunter.

But whenever this great being of incomparable existence was mentioned, the reverence and fear he felt from the bottom of his heart made him feel like an insignificant ant in comparison. From then on, he never dared have a thought of blasphemy anymore.

This change was actually caused by his involuntary reading of the book, Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies.

After waking up from his loss of consciousness, he saw the world in a totally different view.

He had felt nothing but joy for that frenzied passion surging from the depths of his heart and swept through him like a tidal wave. He had now become a fervent believer of “Mr. Lin.”

Night Falcon didn’t feel anything wrong with himself. Rather, he felt like he had just been reborn!

He was very grateful for the guidance of the Faceless Black-scaled Man. Without Wilde, he would’ve continued an unhappy life, not knowing when he would uncover these truths.

Besides him, there were two other members of Blood Feast who were part of the selected few that survived.

On his left was a scholar by the code-name of ‘Bookworm,’ while on his right was a female black magician like Wilde, code-named ‘Snowflake.’

Before all of this had happened, none of them knew the true identity of each other despite their frequent transactions within Blood Feast.

Night Falcon had also only become acquainted with the two after the interactions of the past few days.

Bookworm came from the Truth Union's Alchemy Department, but he was also a deviant that had a preference for researching forbidden knowledge such as human transmutation. After one of his secret experiments was uncovered, he was immediately listed a fugitive by the Truth Union and like Wilde, had been placed on the wanted list.

The true identity of Snowflake was a surprising one. From an esteemed background of a noble clan, she was the only daughter of an aristocratic family with actual power and possessions and had a rather significant status as well. Within the Central District, Snowflake had the reputation of being a beauty with an ice-cold personality.

Blessed with innate talents, she became a black magician and participated in Blood Feast merely for the thrills.

However, she would never have imagined that the thrills would be this overboard this one time.

It had even been a tad terrifying.

Of course, her present self would never think this way. Instead, she was now overwhelmed with bliss and eagerly anticipated being able to meet the 'All-knowing Mr. Lin' soon. Her face was even flushed from the excitement she felt.

If the young nobles who held her in such high regard could see her now, they would find themselves completely dumbfounded and wondering if the girl of their dreams had been stolen and utterly smitten with some unknown guy.

Besides these two, there was still one other person who wasn't here but in the adjacent space struggling to help Wilde feed the... powerful and temperamental Lord Sky Wolf.

That individual code-named 'Soaring Wyvern' was way luckier compared to the three of them. To the envy of the rest of them, Soaring Wyvern had become the assistant of the Faceless Black-scaled Man.

Ever since that day, Wilde had brought them all back to his secret abode which now doubled as a hideout for believers.

After these last few days of inspections, they had finally received recognition and were allowed to meet 'Mr. Lin' at last.

"Good, I am delighted that you are all able to reach this level of enlightenment. This proves that you were all initially chosen not because of luck, but rather, it was fated for all of you to become followers of the Corpse Devouring Sect. This is a destiny comprehensively laid out by the watchful eyes of our Lord.

"Remember, all of your past, present, and future are his gifts. Your entire existence belongs to Mr. Lin."

Wilde said, not forgetting to glorify Lin Jie as he watched the three people before him with satisfaction.

"Yes, Sir Faceless!" The three answered in fervent symphony.

"Perform well and you will find yourself with unimaginable gifts. But if Mr. Lin is dissatisfied, and even if he were not to care, I'll personally give you a taste of how my reputation came into being."

Wilde was very content with the new group of followers. Rather, it was as well expected of Boss Lin's book; once they started reading the book, they were destined to perish and be reborn anew.

Wilde flicked on his top hat, then headed out with his cane in hand.

"Come, follow after me."

Waiting out in the yard was Gall. Seated beside him on the long grass was a large hound with a silver coat with tinges of gray and black, panting heavily with its tongue out.

Gall was all smiles while brushing Grady's fur. Upon seeing Wilde and the other three, he immediately greeted them warmly. "Welcome back. I've finished tidying up the laboratory and checked the defense array. The magic circle for stabilizing spatial fluctuations is all set and Grady has been fed. We are ready to go!"

Gall pounded his chest proudly.

He would gladly endure any hardships as long as he was serving his idol!

Wilde nodded and walked over to give Grady a pat on its head. Things had become much more convenient ever since taming a Sky Wolf. Nothing could compare to its ability to navigate through space, which greatly accelerated the travel speed.

Grady gave a bark and reverted to its original form as a fog along with crackling electricity appeared around its body, enveloping everyone and disappeared moments later along with them.

When it reappeared, the group was already at the doorstep of the bookstore.

Wilde cast a contemplating gaze at the familiar yet foreign sight before him, especially at the next-door book cafe and the new building which had just been completed.

Everyone else instead had their attention on the dilapidated yet mysterious bookstore.

“Let’s head inside. Remember to keep your hands to yourselves and not touch anything in the bookstore,” said Wilde as he took the lead and entered first.

Inside, Wilde was greeted with the sight of the ever-amicable Lin Jie who was reading a book behind the counter as usual. Eyes lighting up, he approached the bookstore owner and greeted, “Boss Lin, it’s been a while!

“I’ve completed the task you had given me.”

Chapter 222: All Willingly

Chapter 222: All Willingly

“Meow?”

To Wilde’s surprise, the sound wasn’t from Lin Jie who looked up, but the cat he was holding in his arms.

“Is this a new pet of yours?” he asked.

With a slight smile, Lin Jie nodded. “Yes. It was a gift from Vincent, he’s the pope of the Sun’s Faith. You might have heard of him, Old Wil, he’s another customer of mine.”

Still meowing softly, the chubby white cat placed its paws on the counter and stared at Wilde and the large hound at his side.

Its gaze lingered on Wilder for quite a while before shifting to Grady.

Being stared at by the cat made Wilde tense up instinctively. His wariness skyrocketed as goosebumps appeared on whichever part of his body was being observed.

His body was screaming at him that this creature which resembled a cat wasn’t as simple as it seemed.

It definitely wasn’t...

Behind the mask, Wilde’s acid green snake eyes had narrowed to a slit. Then, as if the fog of confusion before him was lifted, he was suddenly well aware of the abnormalities of this ‘cat.’

The two fur-covered paws weren’t actually adorable paw pads; rather, curled up within them were long and sharp claws.

Strands of fur covering its body were clearly countless fine tentacles. If one were to take a closer look, it was possible to spot tiny eyeballs between the spaces of those dancing tentacles.

Furthermore, there weren't any eyelids covering those yellow eyes that were constantly swirling and changing which made for a terrifying sight.

And when gazing into the eyeballs for a prolonged period of time, the writhing fleshy lumps covered by red and black capillaries at the back of the eye would become noticeable...

Wilde was mildly shocked. All this proved that the 'cat' creature before him was in fact similar to Grady—a 'mimic.'

"Grr..."

Grady, who was next to him, had its body slightly lowered, growling softly and at full alert as it stared at Whitey.

The cat and the dog stared daggers at each other in a precarious deadlock.

The party behind Wilde were also aware of this chilly atmosphere, causing them to turn pale and shiver.

Gall, who was the closest to Grady, had to bear the most of the brunt. His instincts told him to flee, but sadly, his legs had both turned into jelly, preventing him from moving an inch.

As Pandemonium-ranks, they were able to accurately determine the level of aura the two creatures were displaying.

Needless to say, it was a fact that Grady was a Destructive-rank Sky Wolf.

After all, they had personally experienced it for themselves.

Therefore, an existence which could rival Grady was at the very least Destructive-rank as well.

Which also meant that... At this moment, there were three Destructive-ranks gathered in this tiny bookstore, including Wilde!

What kind of joke was this?

If a powerful organization like the Church of the Dome had three Destructive-ranks and one Supreme-rank, this meant that in terms of combat strength, this ordinary-looking bookstore was nearly on level terms as the Church of the Dome.

This wasn't the most frightening aspect either.

Even more alarming was the fact that this 'cat' behaved like a pet in the arms of the bookstore owner!

Night Falcon gulped. Although Grady had the form of a large pet dog and was also a mimic of a Sky Wolf, he was more like Wilde's companion rather than his pet.

This made Night Falcon's blood race. Everything he had learned from Wilde about 'Mr. Lin' came flooding back into his mind.

This was a truly omniscient and all-powerful existence!

The others were also having similar thoughts. This show of 'intimidation' had immediately won them over. All of them were gazing at Lin Jie like how a believer of any faith would behave seeing their respective god descend from the heavens above and appear before them.

Of course, they truly believed deep down.

Oh... Lin Jie maintained his smile, feeling a bit weirded out by the slightly fanatical manner this bunch of youngsters tagging along with Old Wil was viewing him.

How could he put this; they were like those die-hard fans about to scream their hearts out when coming face to face with their idols.

Boss Lin was skeptical at first, but Old Wil's explanation quickly quelled his doubts.

"I have made some progress regarding the mission you asked of me."

Wilde gave an introduction of these people before elaborating, "They were originally members of Blood Feast, youngsters who had

strayed from their path. However, they were all inspired ever since I passed down your ideologies and book to them and willingly became followers of your books. They fully believe you are their life mentor!”

The few of them nodded their heads. “Yes, we are all willing.”

“I brought them here today to give them a chance to hear your teachings and hope you are satisfied with them.”

Lin Jie had a moment of realization. He stroked Whitey a few times, whose fur was all bristled up from this encounter with the dog, then lifted the chubby cat back onto his lap.

Indeed.

He could recall the only two instances in which he had made what seemed like a request for Old Wil...

The first time had been when he had passed Old Wil the book ***Ceremonies and Customs*** and told him he ‘hoped that it could be recommended to others.’

The second instance had taken place on his previous visit to Wilde. Old Wil had mentioned he had a plan to change those wayward members of Blood Feast.

Which meant to say, this bunch were the results of Old Wil’s efforts!

Lin Jie was elated and chuckled happily. “This is great news! You have done well, Old Wil, performing way beyond my expectations.

“Never would I’ve expected there would be so many people in this world... uh, in this area that would be interested in my books.

“You’ve got to understand, these topics are not well received anywhere. Even my previous students had been complaining about how these topics were too difficult and profound for their liking.

“Often, they acted as if it was torture when I asked them to read more, often fussing and crying, saying that reading too much would blunt their senses and break their minds.”

You are way too humble...

Night Falcon and the others couldn't help being in disbelief. After all, they had seen and even experienced the power contained within the book.

We are hosted novel, find us on google.

Had they failed to withstand it, they would have ended up just like Doyle—going insane and having their heads blown up.

Even now, they could only withstand just a few pages. Any more would result in splitting headaches, as if something within their brains was trying to force its way out.

Wilde, however, had noticed the words “in this world.” Piecing together with past clues made for a startling revelation. *Could Boss Lin be talking about the world behind the Wall of Fog?*

Or perhaps the dream realm?

Moreover... Boss Lin's new pet seems to have a faint aura of the moon.

It was common knowledge that the Church of the Dome had been destroyed by the newly-formed Sun's Faith and Secret Rite Tower. However, those who were more aware of this situation would know that the entire incident had been closely tied to the bookstore.

Including Vincent's rise, the death of the Waning Crescent Apostle, etc.

The Church of the Dome had only recently fallen and Boss Lin was already in possession of an unknown creature that had the moon's aura.

This in itself was very thought-provoking.

And judging from Boss Lin's character, Wilde was 90% certain that Lin Jie might have wanted a pet on a whim after seeing Grady previously.

And after the series of events occurred, dominoes toppled in

succession and the Church of the Dome no longer existed.

And now, the pet Boss Lin wanted was now in front of Wilde.

While Wilde was drowning in his admiration for Boss Lin, Lin Jie smiled at the young man standing at the very front. “You are called Night Falcon? What are some of your thoughts regarding my book?”

Chapter 223: Teacher Lin's Class

Chapter 223: Teacher Lin's Class

Lin Jie grinned at the youth standing before him. "Since you all are so interested in my book, I will also try my best to let you guys understand the meaning of this book. We could even have a casual chat, so we can better 'rehabilitate' everyone.

"I believe that all of you should already have such a notion since you all came here voluntarily."

The youth standing before him had a buzz cut dyed bright golden. His ear studs, lip piercings, and large eye bags combined with his hair gave him an unruly appearance. It might even be easy to mistake him for a hip-hop rapper at first glance.

On top of that, there were some indecipherable black markings on his neck and hands, probably tattoos of some obscure text or symbols.

He had truly turned into a typical youth of society.

From the beginning, Lin Jie didn't have a favorable impression of the group known as Blood Feast.

When he first heard of them, his initial assumption was that it was some sort of organization running a pyramid scheme, which specifically targeted the elderly. He later learned this wasn't the case and that the true nature of the organization was far more nefarious than he expected!

Dealing in transactions of various contrabands, aiding the Church of the Dome in brainwashing their followers, and perhaps many more revolting acts that were done in secret.

This was a truly heinous syndicate.

And this youth with the moniker ‘Night Falcon’ before him was exactly how he had pictured a member of Blood Feast to be—basically someone with a definitive look of immorality to them.

Someone who would easily be judged to be no good with just one glance, having wayward thought processes, and needed to be corrected.

As a former nurturer of young minds and professional chicken soup dealer, Lin Jie was inwardly rubbing his hands in glee as he brewed a plan.

Night Falcon couldn’t help but to gulp discreetly in the face of the bookstore owner’s kindly smile. He felt an inevitable pressure, especially from the cat still resting in Lin Jie’s arms which made him sweat nervously.

However, the fanatical worship he had for Lin Jie prevailed ultimately.

Night Falcon decided to bite the bullet. Taking a deep breath, he replied, “Yes, I am very intrigued by your works and at the same time, come to admire you. I hope to receive your guidance.”

This was what Wilde had previously instructed them to say. All of them already knew that this great and all-knowing being’s quirk, or rather, the method he employed to observe the world—pretending to be an ordinary bookstore owner.

As such, they’d better... No, they had to follow the instructions of Wilde, else they likely ought to infuriate Mr. Lin.

“Ever since leaving Blood Feast, all of us have been learning under the guidance of Sir Wilde. Since our capabilities are limited, we each could only study a different segment of the book. Nevertheless, we’ve all heaps from it.”

Night Falcon continued on, “After reading your book, I was greatly affected and realized all my past doings were reprehensible. The only right choice to be made is chasing after the vastness and greatness of knowledge.”

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow. There was some difference between this fellow and the image of a societal youth he had imagined.

Unlike his unruly appearance, he was actually very courteous and polite... and even had a way with words.

Looks like he's actually picked up a thing or two from the book...

Nodding in satisfaction, Boss Lin proceeded to ask, "Which segment are you currently studying?"

"The f-first segment..." Night Falcon replied, slightly stuttering.

In other words, the overview of all the basic segments in the book. However, the contents of the first segment were far from basic. It described the means of communication between "man" and "God." This had subverted everything Night Falcon had previously known and even gave him a whole new understanding of sordid blood.

Oh... He's only read the introduction, definitions on ceremonies and cultures as well as the connection between the two.

Of course, to those from another world, there is going to be a barrier to understanding the examples and terms used back on Earth.

Without a strong foundation like Old Wil's, these concepts can indeed be difficult to grasp.

"Relax, don't be so anxious. Let's take it slowly. Is there anything you don't understand?"

Night Falcon was deeply touched and on the verge of tears. This benevolence and magnanimity of this great being had simply healed his scarred and broken inner self.

Those days of suffering from being forced by the Faceless Black-Scale Wilde was spontaneously turned into relief.

"I wish to know, what sort of position does blood hold in the communication between man and God?"

Night Falcon asked what he was dying to know.

It was because the source of a hunter's power came from sordid blood, which in turn originated from dream beasts.

Connecting the aforementioned information inside Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies gave him a thought—if the blood were to come from a supreme existence, would they also be able to acquire the power of one?

Sadly till now, nobody had successfully attempted this.

And that was owed to another important characteristic of sordid blood: its tainting of the mind.

Higher concentrations meant higher potency, which in turn made it harder for hunters to endure.

It wasn't that people were unable to harvest the blood of a Supreme-rank dream beast. Rather, it was more of the fact that no ingredient could be used to successfully accent the sordid blood to keep a hunter conscious.

Of those that attempted such a thing, more than half died instantly, while the remaining few that survived became madmen.

Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies had, however, allowed him to find a new direction.

Lin Jie was genuinely surprised now, and his expression shifted from casual to a serious one.

Looks like he had really underestimated Night Falcon. For the crummy youth before him to ask such a profound question meant that he already had a certain level of understanding and level of thought regarding the book Lin Jie had written.

This was a really invaluable discovery.

It meant that Night Falcon wasn't bluffing and had actually understood this concept.

Ceremonies and rituals, in most cases, were a means of communication between man and God.

The aforementioned God didn't just mean the God embodied by the imagination of humans. It also included nature in general; for example, praying for good weather. This was after all an expression of human wishes.

"That's a good question."

Lin Jie wasn't stingy with his praise. "Blood is an essential component in various sacrificial ceremonies, and the reason behind it is the spirituality contained within it."

"Spirituality?" Night Falcon repeated under his breath.

Lin Jie nodded, slowly getting back the feeling of being a teacher; all he lacked now was a podium and a blackboard. "During sacrifices, people believe blood is spiritual, a bond that gives soul to the dead and allows for communication with the spiritual, including gods."

This wasn't entirely due to his past research; part of it came from what he learned from the human skin book.

"Gives soul to the dead, gives soul to the dead... I understand now!" Night Falcon mumbled to himself.

With a glint in his eyes, he began murmuring with haste, "The spirituality of blood is a residue of the soul. Therefore, sordid blood will always affect the minds of a human no matter what. But dead things won't. So, the true utilization of Supreme-rank sordid blood isn't for use on humans but enchantments!"

"Huh?" Lin Jie didn't catch what he said.

What did you understand?

Thanking Boss Lin gratefully, Night Falcon danced away to the side.

Watching that foolish kid dancing gleefully, Lin Jie sighed, deciding to give up on his treatment. He then looked toward the next one

and asked, "I recalled that you are called Bookworm? What are your thoughts then?"

As if he had been called out by the teacher to answer a question in class, the nervous scholar proceeded to answer with a stammer.

"Chief, we have an emergency!" shouted Claude as he burst through the doors of the meeting room.

Joseph, who was in a meeting with other members of the division, stood up immediately and glanced at the doorway. Upon meeting Claude's gaze, he immediately turned to apologize to the others and took his leave.

"What's happening? Is there any activity at the bookstore?" Joseph casually asked as they rounded a corner.

"Wilde has finally appeared!" Claude exclaimed softly.

Chapter 224: I've Reported The Bookstore

Chapter 224: I've Reported The Bookstore

“Wilde appeared? In the vicinity of the bookstore?” Joseph narrowed his eyes.

Judging from the amount of time they had spent trying to hurt each other, Wilde could rightly be called his nemesis. Furthermore, that battle he had with Wilde had been a crux moment which forever changed his life.

He wouldn't have lost his arm if not for that battle and wouldn't have been plagued by the demon sword's curse which led to him falling from grace.

Even though Wilde seemed to have been blown up by Joseph, the former still had managed to deal a number on the latter. Even worse was that all the old wounds Joseph had accumulated were reopened, and his mental state was also greatly affected.

All of this led him to step back and leave the battlefield.

Yet if not because of this, Joseph wouldn't have come across the bookstore while on his pursuit of Wilde, which ushered in a true turning point in his life — the opportunity to become a Supreme-rank!

After battling the false god within the dream realm, Joseph had truly rediscovered that sword within him.

He could feel that he was already at the final stretch at becoming a Supreme-rank.

And this stretch was now his obsession.

Just like the obsession he had with the battle two years ago!

“Rest assured, I won’t do anything illegal. I’ve only reported the bookstore was hiding scrolls of forbidden spells. But if any property damage occurs during the investigation, that’s none of my concern.

“In no time, you will see that bookstore being closed down!”

Todd had felt his plan was flawless. When he looked toward Melissa, he knew that this arrogant young lady had taken a huge blow this time.

Indeed, his lips curled up to a grin when he saw Melissa turning pale as she watched them with a look of utter terror.

Chapter 225: Whats Wrong

Chapter 225: What's Wrong

Of course, the tip-off to Todd's superiors wasn't done through official means.

The preparatory paperwork required to run a search for prohibited articles like this investigation was not an easy task if done through official means.

Just obtaining a search warrant alone required multiple levels of approval as well as all sorts of verification. Moreover, with a backlog of higher-priority tasks that needed dealing with, it would take at least a week for such a warrant to be approved.

Launching an official investigation of a casual tip-off was just impossible.

The Official Knight by the name of Francis that Tod spoke of, together with his companions, were all from Todd's grandfather's faction and took orders from his grandfather's subordinates.

Simply put, while they were Todd's superiors on the surface, in truth, they were just the lackeys of Todd, a third generation knight.

Now, the grandson of his superior's superior had asked him for a small favor.

—— Seizing a bookstore owned by an ordinary person whom no one had ever heard of was a piece of cake for transcendent beings like them. The case would naturally be closed as long as they completed the subsequent formalities and kept the bookstore owner's mouth shut.

The higher-ups of Secret Rite Tower were busy people. As long as this was done quickly and cleanly without making a scene, nobody would care.

Furthermore, their direct superior was part of Secret Rite Tower's higher management. It was much easier to do stuff with his shielding.

Francis was a Pandemonium-rank Official Knight. According to the rank system in Secret Rite Tower, the Official Knight title was higher than an Apprentice Knight, which was in turn higher than a Knight Trainee.

Of course, a knight's grade wasn't a good representation of their strength. There were also many Pandemonium-rank Knight Trainees, and as for Official Knights... Any authorized personnel of Secret Rite Tower not appointed as a Great Radiant Knight was an Official Knight.

At this moment, he was 'on a mission.'

Francis led his men into an ordinary bookstore, ready to seize it immediately, to give the Great Radiant Knight's son the perfect end he desired.

Chapter 226: With No Warning Or Indication

Chapter 226: With No Warning Or Indication

“Are you certain it’s this bookstore?” said Francis as he looked at the storefront a short distance away.

The store was exactly just as reported: without any sign, decorations, nor anything special.

Ordinary and poor were words that anyone seeing this would use to describe it.

However, the book cafe next door, which wasn’t open yet, appeared refreshing and eye-catching. Even if situated in the Central District, it would be considered an ‘upmarket’ place.

The contrast was particularly evident since the two units were adjacent to each other.

Although Francis had no sense for business, he couldn’t help but think that the book cafe had deliberately chosen to set up shop beside such a bookstore to increase its business.

When he thought about it this way, perhaps his actions today might make the book cafe lose some of its competitive edge.

Well, sorry about that then. The corner of Francis’ lips curled into a wicked smile.

A burly knight beside him replied in a husky voice, “Yes, there is no mistake. This is the bookstore that Selena mentioned.”

“But it’s the only bookstore left in the area. It’s strange that a bookstore in the middle of nowhere for years has yet to close down, and everything that happened in the last few months was nearby.”

“On their own accord?!”

Claude had a ugly look on his face. This was completely ridiculous in his opinion. What if Wilde were to realize something was off and cause their entire ambush to fall apart because these fools acted on their own?!

“Find out who they are and the reason for them coming... Wait a minute.”

Claude suddenly paused. He thought of another possibility.

“Could it be that... Mr. Lin intentionally arranged it to avoid disputes among his customers?”

Chapter 227: Boss Lin's True Motive

Chapter 227: Boss Lin's True Motive

Could this also be part of Boss Lin's plan?!

Claude's eureka moment wasn't without basis.

Since they were to take action in front of the bookstore, they had naturally also taken into consideration Mr. Lin's line of thinking and wishes—in fact, this could be counted as the most important detail.

Their current assessment had revealed that Boss Lin didn't mind a cooperative or competitive relationship among his patrons.

One example was the episode where Secret Rite Tower had worked together with Vincent.

Another would be the rivalistic relationship between Ms. Ji from Rolle Resource Development and Deputy Branch Head Cherry from the Ash Chamber of Commerce.

But what if there was hostilities between bookstore patrons which concerned life and death?

Perhaps to Boss Lin, it might just be some other insignificant commotion unworthy of his time.

However, if a death resulted from his patrons pitting themselves against another, it might be a source of amusement lost to Boss Lin.

There were still many undetermined factors.

Joseph took over Claude and led the operation to clean up the battlefield, including rescuing Francis and the others, all of whom were still in shock and gravely injured.

Claude told his teacher about the hypothesis he had.

Shaking his head, Joseph replied, “If that were so, Boss Lin wouldn’t even have given the chance to cross paths once again.”

Claude stiffened, then asked with slight hesitation, “So...?”

Eyeing the bookstore in the distance, Joseph went on, “Boss Lin obviously wants me and Wilde to have a showdown where he chooses the victor to train as a Supreme-rank!”

Chapter 228: Doris Within The Dream

Chapter 228: Doris Within the Dream

“Boss Lin isn’t opposed to the hostility between Wilde and me, for we wouldn’t even have the chance to meet here if that was the case. He just believes that it isn’t the time yet.

“From the current outlook, he’s getting Wilde to help him recruit more patrons for him. This is Wilde’s value to him... As for us, we help him by performing certain tasks that are too minuscule for him.

“Since he’s setting us up for a direct confrontation, it must mostly mean that Wilde has finished providing all his worth to Boss Lin who no longer needs him. With that, the animosity between the two of us can finally come to a conclusion.

“All of this must’ve been according to the plan Boss Lin has sequentially laid out.”

These words of Joseph reverberated constantly in Claude’s mind all the way till the mess was sorted out and Francis’ group were brought back to Secret Rite Tower.

Choosing a victor between the two Destructive-ranks Joseph and Wilde, to help ascend to Supreme-rank...

Though it was known from the beginning that this kind and amiable bookstore owner by the name of Lin Jie possessed fearsome power, it was Joseph’s words that made it seem especially impactful.

As if receiving a hammer blow to his heart, Claude was completely shaken.

This sort of saying was familiar to him... Any knight receiving training at Secret Rite Tower would find it so.

An elimination system to pick a few suitable candidates out of dozens of Knight Apprentices, to undergo elite training where only the top few candidates would be chosen to become a Great Radiant Knight.

On top of that, he could occasionally come across and view the dreams of others here.

Today, as per usual, Lin Jie planned to ‘find’ an interesting dream realm after his practice.

But when he accidentally came across a certain greenish dream realm, Lin Jie saw a familiar face.

The image of a beautiful blond elf with ocean blue eyes in an elegant white dress barging into his bookstore on a rainy night suddenly flashed across his mind.

“Doris?”

Chapter 229: Lin Jie Is Watching

Chapter 229: Lin Jie Is Watching

Doris?

Lin Jie was briefly stunned as his flitting between dreams came to an abrupt halt.

He stood at the edge of the dream, watching from above and once again carefully verified what he had seen.

Standing in the forest and gazing into the distance, the solemn yet beautiful elf gleamed with splendor.

It was that rich lady **ahem* super customer who had visited the bookstore on a rainy night under Ji Zhixiu's recommendation and purchased a whopping thirty copies of ***Emblems & Totems*** .

"It's really her... What a coincidence."

Lin Jie broke into the usual affable smile he used for greeting his customers.

"It's been a few months, I wonder if her clan has finished the 'preview' of that book."

Just as he usually did when spectating other dreams, Lin Jie let his consciousness sink down, transcending the boundary between the outer void and dream realm, arriving into the other party's dream.

At first glance, the initial impression this dream gave off was that it was all green, because its setting was what appeared to be a primeval forest.

As Lin Jie wandered around, the environment reminded him of a time when he had ventured into an old forest while conducting some folklore research, and it evoked a sense of nostalgia.

All around him were huge intertwined roots of gigantic, vine-infested trees covered in algae and a forest floor covered in a bed of fallen leaves. As if in the dark night, cryptograms twinkled and emitted bright, blue lights in nooks and crannies both near and far.

Of course, what shone the brightest in this place was undoubtedly Doris herself.

Gleaming with splendor wasn't just an apt description of the elf lady's ravishing beauty. She was literally glowing (physically)...

Doris had on a magnificent white gown with mysterious yet beautiful gold patterns on the edges, and this faint gold texture could indistinctly be seen on the soft fabric. An emerald pendant on her forehead complemented her pure, turquoise eyes perfectly.

In her hand was a birch scepter, with intertwining vines and an iris flower at its tip.

Together with her long, flowing golden hair, her upright, elegant posture and solemn expression emanated a disposition of sacrosanct. Combined with the strange sources of glowing light around her dispelling the darkness around, she seemed exactly like an elven queen from a fairy tale.

I thought that her previous cosplay was chuunibyou enough... So this is actually the final form?

Lin Jie stroked his chin as he stood behind her, pondering about the plot of this dream and what it reflected about Doris's internal desires.

While in other's dream realms, Lin Jie currently wasn't able to manipulate it as he wished most of the time.

His body wasn't visible nor material to others either, and it was as if he was an apparition that only had the ability to observe.

Only if it was like Silver's case, where he was willingly accepted into her dream realm with complete authority, could Lin Jie do whatever he pleases.

Otherwise, wanting to change anything or to reveal his body would require aether...

Till now, Lin Jie has only accumulated a meager amount of aether — and it was what he had recovered after the dream realm of the Church of the Dome's Central Chapel collapsed.

Naturally, Lin Jie couldn't bear to use it on such an occasion, and just observing would suffice.

Having specifically read Sigmund Freud's book previously, he had gained some theoretical understanding about dreams.

Although the initial purpose was to interpret his own dreams, after quite some time and effort interpreting, Lin Jie eventually verified that he hadn't dreamed of Silver... but had intruded Silver's dream realm by accident.

However, he was still confident in his ability to interpret dreams!

While he might not be able to interpret his own dreams, the dreams of others could still be doable.

"Mhmm... There's movement, is the 'plot' of this dream beginning to unfold?"

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow as he watched Doris tilt her head and gaze afar before raising the staff in her hands. At this instance, a radiant glow of light started to spread in all directions as though it was forming a formless enchantment

Initially, vague tremors started but were contained by the enchantment. However, they soon became more violent as the earth shuddered and even the surrounding trees felt as if they were just hanging by a thread.

At the same time, the surface of the ground began to crack and swell as though a massive earthquake had ripped through this place.

Only the area around Doris that was shrouded by light remained

unscathed.

Dreams could be fragmented and bizarre, yet sometimes weave together a self-consistent logic to complete a story.

Lin Jie enjoyed rummaging through these dream realms to kill boredom by seeking stories and also to satisfy the innate human desire of voyeurism.

From the looks of things now, it seemed as if Doris had incorporated her cosplay character, creating a true elf dream.

Haa... Chuunibyou-ism at its finest.

Lin Jie had a strange look on his face as he wondered if he was imagining things. It seemed that in these dream realms of his customers, every one of them seemed to suffer from Chuunibyou-ism...

“Tsss... Isn’t this way too often? Something doesn’t add up.” Lin Jie shook his head with a frown.

Doris can’t possibly be an elf, could she?

No, no, no, that can’t be possible!

While he knew that elves had once existed in this world, that had been a long time during the Second Era which was several tens of thousands years ago.

How could there possibly still be elves at large in Norzin.

Moreover, Doris was recommended by Ji Zhixiu and she wants to restore the glory of her clan.

If she’s indeed an elf, why would she be introduced by an ordinary human to come here for help and even heed it? And even bought 30 copies of the same book?

Judging from the look in her eyes back then, Lin Jie could tell that Doris completely trusted him.

If she's truly an elf, wouldn't she be able to tell that my book is merely an ordinary academic book and not some magic book?

"I must really be overthinking," Lin Jie muttered as his tightly scrunched brows started to loosen. The doubt that surfaced gradually disappeared.

"It must be the recent surfacing of traces of supernatural powers that's making me paranoid. In fact, after proper thought, if even a weakling like Gabriel can control the Church of the Dome, how could there be powerful transcendent races existing in this world now."

He put his mind at ease and continued to watch Doris's silhouette.

Following the direction of Doris's gaze, Lin Jie He saw an enormous figure from the ground leaping high into the sky as if it were a whale breaching the ocean's surface.

Lin Jie blinked and watched on intently as the dominating figure descended on Doris.

In the gloomy darkness, the titanic lamprey-like figure revealed a large circular mouth full of sharp teeth as it extended countless horrifying tentacles and came oppressively plunging toward the minuscule elf beneath.

Doris had once again foresaw a dream realm fissure capable of threatening her entire elven clan.

Just as always, she would have this foresight beforehand and inform her clansmen to take refuge before devising a strategy to deal with the foe.

This time, she decided to use herself as bait to lure the enemy's attention.

But from the moment it began, it just seemed like something was just a tad amiss...

As if she could feel a piercing gaze staring at her intently from somewhere unseen.

Chapter 230: Subterranean Walker

Chapter 230: Subterranean Walker

Doris broke out in a cold sweat.

It felt like someone was watching her from close-by, but she was certain there wasn't anyone behind her.

Her 'Earth Enchantment' covered almost a full square kilometer, and she would surely notice if there was someone within this range.

But the fact was that there was nothing behind her.

At the same time, Doris swore that she wasn't hallucinating.

As a prophet, 'Predictive' and 'Perceptive' were her most important aspects, and her sense of intuition was linked to her own air of mystery.

Given her Destructive-rank ability, her intuition being off was more ridiculous than a Supreme-rank tripping over their own feet.

So, the truth was that there had to be some powerful, unknown existence with its gaze on her all this time.

But currently, Doris had no time to worry about who was watching her. The moment of distraction was the most she could afford.

From the start, her attention was entirely focused on the dream realm fissure before her that was stirring.

'Subterranean Walker.' That was the name of the dream beast that had broken through the dream realm fissure.

Doris had gotten its name and power level from her prophecy as well as some fragmented images.

This dream beast was a very powerful Destructive-rank, and it was likely more than what Doris could handle in this forested landscape because of the terrain as well as the dream beast's size and qualities.

There was something peculiar about this dream realm fissure as well — it had opened from deep underground.

Therefore, their ideal scenario of 'stitching up' the dream fissure in advance was not viable. The only remaining option was to encircle and kill this Subterranean Walker.

However, the Subterranean Walker could move freely underground and had a very hard shell that secreted a corrosive acid. Besides the ability to escape quickly, it could also cause great damage to the surrounding environment.

The situation was a very troublesome one.

If Doris was facing the dream beast alone, she could use some large-scale destructive spells to dig three feet into the ground and force it out.

But right now, she had to protect her people as well as the forest they lived in.

This was the responsibility that came with her prophetic powers as a prophet.

Boom!

"It's coming!"

Doris' eyes widened and she looked up.

The lamprey-like worm burst out of the ground like a breaching whale and shot straight at her with its jaws wide open.

A torrent of mud, clods, and splintered trees were blown away from this explosive burst. Doris held the scepter upright in her hand, unwavering and un-moving.

There was a flash from the wooden scepter, and a thin horizontal glimmer of light appeared.

Doris reached out and assumed a posture as though she was about to fire an arrow, and the scepter transformed into a longbow. As she moved, the light coalesced to form a glowing arrow on the bowstring.

Her gaze focused on one point, and even the strong billowing wind peppering her face didn't make her flinch.

The Subterranean Walker greedily widened its mouthpiece to its max, revealing the deep, dark throat behind rings after rings of razor-sharp teeth. At this moment, Doris released the taut bowstring.

Whoosh!

The glowing arrow shot through the air, turning into a brilliant edge of light, piercing straight through the Subterranean Walker's throat and into its body.

"Gaak—Gaahh!!"

The huge worm struck hard in midair and shot up as though a fishbone was lodged in its throat. It thrashed wildly in all directions as the rings of teeth shrank back into the flesh of its jaws with every convulsion of its body.

Bam! Crash!

Surrounding trees were swept aside and came crashing as the acid secreted by the worm dissolved everything it touched into murky sizzling puddles.

Only the area protected by Earth Enchantment remained safe and unscathed.

Doris bounced back several meters and drew the bowstring once more. This time, she fired three light arrows at once that streaked through the air in a flash and landed on her target which were the gaping wounds on the worm.

— Earth enchantment put the ground under the caster's control. Previously, she had hardened the earth, causing the Subterranean Walker's hard shell to get scratched as it passed through jagged rock spikes, which was why it was so angry.

“GAWWRR——”

The worm was furious, and sounds unimaginable to humans came from within its body. Many tentacles unfurled, clinging to the surrounding trees and rocks as it darted toward Doris once more.

Doris took a deep breath, calmed down, and continued raining arrows at the worm while flash stepping toward the place where the ambush formation had been set up.

She was going to lead the Subterranean Walker there!

Things were going according to plan...

But after one of the attacks, Doris watched the worm come to a halt as if it were tired, and alarm bells started ringing in her head.

“Not good!”

Search for the original.

Doris's face stiffened and she turned the staff back to its original form. She reached out to gather the aether around her as she chanted an incantation. A moment later, the ground roared and thundered up, one layer at a time, forming strong earthen walls.

“Fortress Wall!”

The giant worm raised its ‘head’ and paused. Then, its body squirmed rapidly as it opened its closed mouth all of a sudden and sprayed out a stream of glowing red magma!

The dream fissure opened underground and by virtue of the Subterranean Walker's unique body structure, it could swallow large amounts of molten magma and stored it within its body.

Molten aether-infused magma fell on earthen walls with a hiss and

scorched it black before starting to melt the earth. However, magma itself couldn't cause too much damage. As the layers crumbled, the magma instead hardened and fortified the soil, earth, and rocks.

Doris's response had certainly been the right one.

But the magma fell on trees, causing flames to sprout up in an instant and quickly turn into a raging forest fire.

From the distance came the startling cries of her people.

Doris's heart sank.

At this moment when her attention was shifted away, Doris heard a furious roar. When she turned back, the giant worm had stopped spewing magma and dived into the ground.

It seemed that the Subterranean Walker had finally figured out what its foe was up to and returned to an environment it was familiar with while Doris's power was scattered.

Akin to a fish returning back to water, the giant worm moved through the ground with frightening speed.

Greater noises of disturbance could soon be heard in the direction of the elves.

Doris was about to give up fighting the fire and go save her people, but vibrations soundly came from the ground.

Rumble.

For a brief instance, an image flashed across Doris's mind, depicting the underground dream realm fissure widened once more, and another Subterranean Walker emerging...

Her eyes narrowed as she came to the sudden realization that these dream beasts lived in herds!

Chapter 231: He Had Seen It Coming

Chapter 231: He Had Seen It Coming

Flames were spreading throughout the forest and her clansmen were about to be slaughtered. Meanwhile, another Destruction-rank dream beast was about to appear... Doris felt helpless and was beleaguered from all sides.

She gritted her teeth and made flash steps in the direction of where her clansmen were.

I have to save the clan first!

The fire speedily ravaged the forest, and the magma brought from the depths of the earth seemed to sweep everything away with its destructive power.

“High Priestess!”

A female elf spotted Doris and called out.

She was flustered and her eyes were filled with fear. However, this was replaced with hints of hope and reliance the moment she saw Doris.

“Mother!”

The female elf was accompanied by her child who was fifteen, but by the growth cycle of an elf, he was only a child of about six to seven years old. In correspondence to his age, his appearance seemed very young too.

Even by human standards, he was still just a child.

At this moment, he was clinging onto his mother and crying. Tears streamed down his face and there was a bruise on his leg, one which he must have gotten from falling in panic.

The female elf squeezed out a gentle smile in a bid to soothe her child.

“The High Priestess is here!”

“What should we do now, High Priestess?”

“Ahh! That dream beast is coming!”

“Quick, run!”

More people had noticed Doris and cast hopeful gazes at her, and cries of help resounded all around as they reached out to her for help.

Some of the male elves who stayed started to organize themselves and maintain order. They used basic spells to put out the fire, but the growing flames soon drove them back.

The mages, warriors, and archers of the clan had all been brought to the ambush formation at the other end, while those that stayed here were just ordinary helpless elves.

Although defensive array circles had been set up here, they could only withstand a few Destructive-rank attacks. These arrays could hold out perfectly if it was just one Subterranean Walker...

“Calm down! Don’t panic!” Doris first tapped the ground with the scepter, allowing the sound of the scepter to reach the ears of every clansman, and used magic to soothe their frayed nerves.

“With the defensive array in place, these worms can be held back for the time being. Head to the altar now, the elders will make the arrangements.”

There was a teleportation array at the altar, which could directly teleport people to Norzin.

But at the same time, it would mean that they were giving up this forest.

This would be the last resort, but the teleportation array could only

send away less than a third of the clansmen.

Doris recalled the others who were lying in wait at the site of the ambush. Since the Subterranean Walkers had already detected them, the trap had become meaningless.

Doris got people in the clan who were able to fight to stay. This way, at least one of the beasts could be eliminated quickly...

But the problem was that there was still one more.

Doris even had a definite hunch that there weren't just two but even more... This was no longer a Destructive-rank dream invasion.

Was a multitude of Destruction-rank dream beasts much different from a single Supreme-rank?

If this went on, things would only go from bad to worse...

"This is something unprecedented. The dream realm fissure is still expanding, and the force that has always held back invasions from the dream realm seems to have weakened considerably.

"Something terrible must have happened in a spot that I couldn't foresee..."

Doris herself was shocked.

She was more than a thousand years old, and even as a long-living race, she could already be considered as an elder.

During this time, from when she came of age, Doris had served as the high priestess of the clan, protecting the clan and its domain, the forest.

Far away from the giant man-made city, Norzin, all kinds of transcendent species that had survived from ancient times were hidden in their respective settlements and on the wane. Only businessmen and desperate criminals would enter Norzin and make contact with humans.

Just dealing with the invasion of dream beasts from the dream

realm was already too much for them to cope with.

It was the same for the Iris Clan where Doris was from.

Elves were no longer the valiant warriors of the ancient kingdom that flourished back in the past. Over the long years, they were isolated and basically didn't face much threats besides dream beasts.

Those who survived the cataclysm weren't those descended from powerful individuals either and thus, the average elves, were basically ordinary and powerless.

That was why Doris needed to seek the help of Lady Silver who was said to have protected them.

"Wait... Lady Silver!"

Doris suddenly came to the realization that she had already asked for the great being's help!

In Norzin's bookstore, where the aura of Silver's dream realm had descended, Doris had met Lady Silver's Blessed One, that friendly bookstore owner.

When she had asked for help to restore the Iris Clan's former glory and receive the blessings of Lady Silver, the bookstore owner had sold her 30 copies of the book, ***Elder Sign*** .

He also said that this was preparation for his future work and hoped that Doris' clansmen could take a look first.

Doris once sensed information such as "Resistance" and "Dream" from within that book. After studying carefully, she also established that these were knowledge related to a runic sigil.

She knew that this sigil contained powerful magic, but at the same time, it also had a certain learning threshold.

Over the course of these few months, only a portion of Iris Clan members who had an affinity with aether could peruse it, and in total, there were less than a hundred who had learned how to draw

the sigil.

But in the current predicament... It inspired Doris with a new idea.

Had she been misunderstanding it all this time?

Was this rune not actually meant for everyone to learn so as to receive Lady Silver's help but was instead a means to tide over this current crisis?!

He... had seen it coming!

Doris recalled the young bookstore owner's mysterious smile and suddenly felt a great sense of relief.

"Wait!" Doris called out to her panicking clansmen. The clansmen had huge trust in their high priestess, so they immediately stopped and looked toward her.

She looked around and said, "I once brought all of you the gift of Lady Silver's Blessed One! That is the will of Lady Silver and the key to getting us out of this crisis! Those who have learned the sigil from the book, **Elder Sign**, draw it on yourself and the others at once!"

Rumble...

The defensive barrier was crumbling and the ground shuddered continuously.

Though afraid, the elves acted accordingly to Doris's order. After almost half of those who learned the sigil had painted 'Elder Sign', the barrier was broken through and two Subterranean Walkers rushed in with their mouths gaping.

One of them was stopped by Doris and the warriors, but the other took the opportunity to dive into the ground.

The elves squeezed together, pushing and shoving. The elf child from earlier fell to the ground and burst into tears.

BOOM... GAWRR—

His mother looked over and saw the giant worm burst out of the ground and headed for her child with its gaping mouth with rings and rings of razor-sharp teeth.

“NO!!!”

The female elf rushed over to embrace her child, shutting her eyes tightly and awaited death.

But after quite some time, she didn't feel the pain she had imagined.

The female elf opened her eyes in a daze only to see that the worm had stopped above her. Its mouth was still twitching and she could almost feel the warm rancid breath blowing on her face. However, the worm did not go any further, even backing away as if it was in fear.

.

Chapter 232: God Said (I)

Chapter 232: God Said (I)

The Subterranean Walker's huge body hovered over the mother and child, casting an oppressive shadow over them.

Smoking-hot acid was still dripping from its open mouth-parts, corroding large holes in the ground as it fell in droplets.

However, it didn't move forward and instead cowering on the spot as if it had encountered something frightful, disgusting, or troublesome.

And at the very moment it hesitated, Doris seized the opportunity and impaled the sides of the still Subterranean Walker with numerous huge ground spikes.

After letting out a final piercing roar, the worm writhed frantically and raised its head up before finally falling to the ground with a loud bang.

After its remaining life faded, the leftover magma stored inside its damaged stomach pouch leaked out. The golden-red liquid, which was glowing in the darkness, seemed to have an ignition reaction with the acid secretions which further fueled the blaze.

But Doris had no time to worry about the fire. She raced back to the barrier, a bow in hand, and fired an arrow at the remaining Subterranean Walker.

Like a streak of lightning, the unleashed arrow shot through the air in a straight line and struck the worm's body, bursting it open and tearing a hole in its shell.

"Aooo —"

The Subterranean Walker was immediately distracted, and it roared at Doris in fury. After turning around, it then dived back into the

ground.

The female elf who was protecting her child watched as the Subterranean Walker disappeared into a large pit ahead of her. She was stunned for a few moments before she finally sank to the ground, tears welling up in her eyes.

She burst into tears and hugged her frightened child tightly while soothing him.

Doris put down the scepter and walked to them.

The elves around were both bewildered and in shock.

But as the first one returned to his senses, he shouted excitedly, "It's the sigil! The 'Elder Sign' is protecting us!"

He pointed to the mysterious and bizarre pentagram mark painted on the female elf's clothes.

Then, the other elves also caught on and started embracing each other with exultation and ecstasy as if they had just survived a disaster.

Some covered their faces and sobbed tears of joy, while others fell to their knees and prayed fervently to the altar behind them.

"Praise Lady Silver! The Iris Flower's glory existed in the past and is still present today and will last for all eternity!" They shouted loudly with their hands in the air.

The scene was rather chaotic.

"Phew..."

Doris heaved a sigh of forced relief as she listened to the clan's joyous and noisy chatter while surveying the traces on the earth beneath her feet left by the Subterranean Walker beneath.

The Elder Sign is effective!

The great Blessed One had already foreseen this mortal crisis that would

befall the Iris Clan long before this.

This was why he had sold me those books and instructed me to have my clan study them.

Lady Silver has always been looking out for her anointed all this time!

But then again, the great Blessed One is indeed powerful. Everything that the young hunter said was true. He's really worthy of being praised as 'omniscient and omnipotent.'

Doris felt a tinge of envy.

Lady Silver must have thought highly of him. Perhaps he's close with her and a trusted Blessed One... But his true identity is still a mystery.

Shaking her head several times, Doris pulled herself together. She tapped her scepter on the ground and told her clansmen to gather together and retreat as far as possible.

Since a majority of the clansmen had not yet been marked with the Elder Sign, Doris had to get those marked and unmarked to mix together and take care of those who hadn't yet received the Elder Sign.

After that, Doris caught her breath and went back outside the defensive boundary.

Her slight weariness was replaced by intense concentration once more.

Although she was a spent force, a Destructive-rank dream beast wasn't easy to deal with, not to mention that fighting wasn't her forte and she mainly relied on her foresight to deal with enemies.

However, she couldn't let those clansmen behind who trusted in her down. Even if she were to exhaust all her strength and eventually meet with death, that was her calling as High Priestess.

Bring it on... I hope my soul can enter Lady Silver's dream realm when I die.

With a determined smile on her radiant face, Doris planted her scepter into the ground. Seeds that were in the earth all around her sprouted and grew rapidly to besiege the remaining Subterranean Walker.

The ground thundered and the shape of a giant floundering worm appeared among the upheaval of earth. The entire forest also seemed to have risen up from the ground in a scene of massive destruction and ruin.

Doris's face gradually turned pale as she gasped for air with trembling hands.

As long as these Subterranean Walkers did not attack her people, she would have more room to give play to her abilities.

In a battle between Destructive-ranks, collateral damage and accidental injury to the innocent were of the greatest concern.

Take the famed battle between Wilde and Joseph for example. The prerequisite then had been for Wilde to be lured into a deserted area in the hills, so the two — especially Joseph — could maximize their strength.

But now, the current situation was still bleak.

These seeds were not as simple as they seemed.

They were the seeds of the legendary elven kingdom's sacred tree, buried away for many thousands of years. Tough and resilient, their growth was directly augmented by Doris' vitality, and the constant draining of her life force was making her weak.

At this moment, another prophetic scene appeared in Doris' mind.

Unexpectedly, the underground dream realm fissure had widened once more.

Doris' hunch had been right, these Subterranean Walkers were gregarious dream beasts!

But in her vision this time round, there were two that appeared

concurrently, interlacing with each other like a pair of dragons, headed toward the surface and breaking through the earth.

These two Subterranean Walkers would reach the surface and join the fray in under a minute.

And by then—

“It will really be over...” muttered Doris feebly, her grip on the scepter loosening.

The constant outflow of life force was overwhelming. It had now become a situation where the sacred trees were frantically gobbling at her life force, and there was no way for her to stop it.

Fortunately, the sacred trees were already fully grown.

That Subterranean Walker caught by them was strangled to death, leaving only a shrunken skin that had been nearly sucked dry.

I've held on long enough, all my clansmen should have pretty much been transferred to other places...

Doris blacked out as soon as she saw the two new arrivals break through the surface of the earth. Her vision turned dark and she collapsed.

At this moment, she felt someone hold on to her waist from behind as she was falling.

The elven high priestess widened her eyes in bewilderment, and a vaguely familiar young voice sounded beside her.

“Haa... Nightmares are terrible. Let me help you change this.”

Chapter 233: God Said (Ii)

Chapter 233: God Said (II)

Doris did not exactly hear what the male voice behind her said.

It was as if this voice was speaking underwater, vague and distorted. Not a word was clear, and it even sounded a little erratic.

Only the tone was vaguely familiar.

But it was just that trace of familiarity that evoked Doris' prophetic instincts.

In this brief moment, Doris seemed to have returned to the dimly lit bookstore. Before her was the dark-haired young man with onyx eyes sitting behind the counter bathed in dull yellow light. His chin resting on a hand above his folded arms with a kindly smile, and he had said—

"Welcome."

Yes, it's exactly the same!

The Great Blessed One?!

There hadn't been a single indication or any abnormal aether fluctuations since a while ago. And as far as her senses were concerned, there was also no one behind her at the moment. Was this a near-death hallucination?

However, the contact on her waist and her back was incredibly realistic, as if there really was an invisible person behind her and supporting her with absolute strength.

No, wait...

Doris finally came back to her senses. She took hold of the scepter again, gasping for breath, and regained her strength. Then, her

consciousness returned to reality.

Her eyes narrowed as she remembered how she felt someone watching her in the forest when she had been awaiting the opening of the dream realm fissure.

At that time, she had guessed it was probably some mysterious and powerful being.

But from the look of things now, could it be Lady Silver's Blessed One?

Had he been watching from the sidelines all this while? Not only had he given her the solution to the crisis in advance, he had even personally come to help the desperate and helpless. Perhaps this was all a test; Lady Silver had witnessed the piety they held in their hearts and was willing to shelter them again!

But arriving in this manner without a trace... and that mysterious Elder Sign.

Just how strong is the Blessed One? Doris' mind was wild with guesses.

However, in her gradually clearing vision, the two newly arrived Subterranean Walkers were rushing at her, giving her a harsh reminder that now wasn't the time to be distracted.

She had to face the strong onslaught of the enemy.

She was about to pick up her scepter and resume fighting, but the being behind didn't let her go. Instead, he pulled her back and commented in a tone of disgust, "These worms are really ugly, can't they be made to look better?"

This time, Doris heard the words better and could understand what was said.

However, being able to understand these words only made her more confused.

She could completely understand why he thought the worms were

ugly, but what did he mean by “Can’t they be made to look better?”...

She even wanted to ask, “Is it even possible for them to ‘be made to look better?’” They weren’t the creator, so how could they decide what these dream beasts should look like?

Then, Boss Lin showed her what he meant by ‘be made to look better.’

The one who made his sudden appearance and came to the rescue was naturally Lin Jie who had been silently observing from the sidelines as if he were watching an interesting movie.

Though this movie scene was somewhat distorted and had unclear audio as though a mist shrouded it.

He had initially just wanted to see the plot of the dream and to try and interpret what Doris’ subconscious thoughts meant.

His analysis had been on point in the beginning.

Take the giant worm for example, that probably represented Doris’ inner fear.

The appearance of that elven clan likely represented her inner sense of responsibility to her family.

Besides that, those scribbled charms that she got her kin to draw which inadvertently protected them were most likely a representation of the books that Lin Jie sold to her before.

This meant that her clan regarded his book as a hope of revival.

Lin Jie was amused by the thought that his book was a weird charm in Doris’ dream.

But when the mother and child were nearly eaten by the worm, Lin Jie nearly couldn’t bear to watch on and almost personally modified the dream with his aether. Fortunately, that scribbled charm took effect at that time.

Later on, Lin Jie felt that he had to take action after seeing Doris refusing to give up even though her face was pale and she was as weak as a candle in the wind.

Lin Jie's conscience would forever gnaw at him if the customer who bought 30 books died in front of his eyes!

Even though this was only a dream, it felt very real. All too real for Lin Jie that it could make him feel uncomfortable.

Why should he bring suffering upon himself if he felt extremely uncomfortable?

After all, this was just inside a dream.

He might as well just modify it for her.

"It would be better if they were cats."

That was how Lin Jie put it.

With these thoughts, aether reconstructed the dream.

The two worms leaped up, revealing their gaping mouth-parts. In front of all who were watching, their enormous bodies "popped" and turned into two black cats.

They fell onto the ground with a 'plop' and purred like kittens begging for milk.

The elves, who had been running and screaming in a great panic, suddenly quieted down and stared at the scene with their mouths agape.

"W-what is going on?!"

"Where are the dream beasts?"

"Those cats... Impossible. It can't be, right?!"

Everything that had just happened seemed beyond what normal people could comprehend.

Two Destructive-rank dream beasts, the size of hills, had suddenly turned into small kittens.

Was there anyone who can comprehend this?!

Lin Jie nodded in satisfaction. Behind him was a dumbfounded Doris whose head was reverberating with nothing but ‘meow meow meow.’

She knew for certain that this was no illusion nor a change of form. It was all real; giant worms had been turned into cats. An entire life-form had been deconstructed and reorganized into a whole new existence in an instant.

This-this is power that only a Creator can possess!

It was as if they were toys made out of clay, being molded all over again to create a new one because the original was deemed too ugly.

Doris felt a frightening chill surging up from her spine. This was beyond what most transcendent beings could do. Even Destructive- and Supreme-ranks were incapable of doing such a thing.

Only... a god could do it!

Only a god could freely modify his own creations.

But that was not all.

Lin Jie looked around and added, “Hmm... The fire should be extinguished as well.”

At that moment, the monstrous blaze that had nearly enveloped the whole forest disappeared, leaving behind a landscape of burnt and collapsed trees as well as scorched earth.

Lin Jie slapped his head, feeling really silly.

“Forget it, just restore it to its original state.”

Doris listened to the voice full of impatience beside her and was dumbstruck to see everything return to its original appearance as though time had been reversed.

Even the underground dream realm fissure seemed as if it had never existed.

Everything was like a dream.

Chapter 234: Shepherd Of The Stars

Chapter 234: Shepherd of the Stars

Silence reigned within the forest.

All the elves had surprisingly unanimous expressions as they stood dumbfounded, their dull eyes staring blankly at the unbelievable, fantasy-esque scene that unfolded before them.

Who am I? Where am I?

What am I doing?

Only these three profound philosophical questions lingered in their minds, as everything that made sense had seemingly crumbled in an instant.

The two humongous Destructive-rank beasts had turned into helpless little kittens and were crawling about meekly.

The ravaging blaze that devoured the forest and everything in its path had also instantly vanished.

Most freakish was the transformation of dead trees and scorched earth back into the initial lush and fertile environment. It was as if someone had removed a canvas of ruins over the initial appearance of the landscape; the past was all an illusion and the present was actual reality.

They were now doubting their entire elven lives, for their perception of everything seemed to have been thrown out the window.

However, this couldn't possibly be an illusion because the injuries they sustained as well as the Elder Sign marking their clothes were still present.

After a brief moment of silence, a chaotic commotion followed.

“What... what happened?”

“Is it Lady Silver’s arrival?”

“It’s a miracle!”

“Hahahahaha, eternal glory to the Iris!”

“Hahahah....”

“Did-did you all hear... hear something just now?”

“Hear what?”

“Yes! Yes! I think there was a hard-to-describe sound coming from the direction of the High Priestess. It was... muffled and unclear. It sounded like someone speaking or maybe it was the overlapping of many voices. I get a splitting headache whenever I attempt to make out the message but I just could not resist trying to...”

“That magnitude of strength is unnerving. Could it be the work of a Supreme-rank?”

“No, I’m afraid it’s beyond that...”

Scattered conversations like these broke out within the ranks of the elves.

The alarmed elders at the altar came out to survey the surroundings in bewilderment, wondering to themselves if they had been dreaming.

With a complicated look on her face, Doris surveyed her clansmen who were all busy in discussion. Currently, she could no longer detect Lin Jie’s presence.

He had probably done what he felt was necessary and wasn’t willing to engage in any additional interactions, displaying the typical caprice of those sorts of higher beings.

But just like before, she could still feel a gaze on her.

This let her know that the mysterious bookstore owner hadn't left yet.

God said, let there be light.

And there was light.

Out of the blue, these words appeared in Doris' mind.

Staring at the forest which had regained its usual tranquility, Doris listened to the orchestra of nature; a euphony of bird song, insect chirps, and leaves rustling. She could still feel the searing heat lingering in the night breeze as she struggled to calm herself down.

This is already a miracle...

"Is he really Lady Silver's Blessed One?"

Doris also had doubts when she had first paid a visit to Lin Jie at the bookstore.

Back then, she was dubious of his legitimacy as a businessman and was worried that he would rip her off with counterfeit or shoddy goods.

But now, she even felt that Lin Jie might even be an entity similar in status to Lady Silver who had been hidden away in history.

After a moment's hesitation, Doris looked in the direction of where the gaze was coming from, with the intention of expressing her gratitude in words.

However, she was interrupted by an approaching elder.

The feeling of being watched disappeared at this instance. This time, it was truly gone.

"What exactly happened here, High Priestess?"

All the other elves fell silent when this question was asked.

They too were all eager to know what had just transpired.

Doris took a deep breath, recollecting her thoughts and composure. With the air of a High Priestess, she proclaimed, “The great Lady Silver who controls snow and ice has descended from her dream realm and has favored the one chosen by the stars.”

She suppressed whatever other thoughts she had running through her mind.

Regardless of what level of existence the Blessed One was, since he had been willing to save them, it meant that he was willing to help the Iris Clan.

This was the only way for her clan to survive on!

They needed to cling on to it tightly!

“Previously, he handed us the Elder Seal to resist the dream realm. Just as the Primordial Witches built the high wall to isolate the dream realm, the Elder Sign prevents us from being harmed by dream beasts.”

The elves listened intently, and the words of their High Priestess made it seem as though they could feel the will of the Primordial Witches.

Yes, it all felt like history was repeating itself.

In the past, the Primordial Witches isolated the dream realm beyond the high wall. Today, the dream beasts were being expelled by the Elder Sign.

“As of now, he is here by our side...”

A commotion started stirring among the elves when this was said.

An elder asked with a trembling voice, “All that happened just now, was it the power of the great Blessed One?”

Doris paused. Then, to her surprise, she noticed that the iris flower on the top of her scepter started to emit a faint glow as a second iris

flower bloomed, followed by a third...

The flowers swayed in rhythm with the wind as though Lady Silver was encouraging and approving of her words.

The elves watched this scene with excitement.

Doris shut her eyes. With this 'Predictive' omen appearing, she exclaimed involuntarily, "It is him, who extinguished the catastrophic fire and restored the light of life. Protecting all believers and holding the key to all knowledge. He, who holds the power of time and space in his hands and capable of transcending the boundary between life and death.

"His name is unknown and he isn't the blessed one chosen by the stars. Rather, he is the shepherd that has been tending to successive generations of stars."

As she recited, shadows on the ground started dancing as though something was being awakened.

Elven shrieks of alarm rang out.

"Priscilla... a-aren't you dead?!"

The elves had just emerged from within the forest, seemed equally puzzled. "I don't know either... I remember perishing in battle, but I don't know what happened next and I suddenly regained consciousness out of nowhere..."

"That's wonderful! It's surely the doing of the great Blessed One. He answered the High Priestess' prayers and resurrected all of you!"

Doris's eyes widened in shock and disbelief.

Shepherd... of the Stars.

She was probably the only one who knew how much this conversation had elevated the status of the bookstore owner.

The elven High Priestess stared at her returning clansmen, no longer capable of comprehending the logic behind all of it... She

was astute enough to realize that digging any further would lead her to uncover things that she shouldn't.

The more she knew, the more dangerous it would be.

Thereupon, she broke into a gratified smile and joined in the jubilation of her clansmen in a bid to invigorate their morale.

"I will visit the bookstore again soon. I'm sure that I will be able to gain Lady Silver's recognition this time.

"For now, we will have to reorganize ourselves first..."

Doris instructed everyone to perform their duties duly. However, when she returned back to the altar to inspect the elven clan's stronghold, she stopped in her tracks.

The various shadows on the ground had stopped dancing and had gradually settled themselves into what seemed like the strokes of handwritten characters.

"You're welcome."

Dawn.

Lin Jie sat upright on his bed and rose for a stretch before admiring the warm, radiant sunshine from the window.

His mood for the day seemed to brighten up.

He stroked his chin with a grin and muttered, "A nightmare turned into a pleasant dream. Doris must be really happy."

Chapter 235: Citrus

Chapter 235: Citrus

Lin Jie got up early as usual and was in high spirits after accomplishing a good deed.

As the saying goes, a day's plan lies in the early morning. Waking up after a nightmare would no doubt lead to a glum mood that would ruin the entire day.

Constantly burdened by and worrying about her clan's survival had resulted in Doris dreaming about being helpless when her clan faced a crisis.

Such a nightmare would no doubt add on to her anxiety and might even lead to an undesirable aftermath. Doris was a potential VIP customer, and she shouldn't be neglected.

Therefore, Lin Jie had spent some of his aether, which he didn't have much use for currently, to turn the nightmare into a pleasant dream...

Truth be told, calling it a pleasant dream might have been excessive glorification. However, it was a tragedy turned nonsensical with a tinge of comedy. At least, it wouldn't pile onto Doris's negative emotions...

However, this wasn't important. The main point was helping others!

As a passionate and kind man who liked to help others, Lin Jie felt that it was all worthwhile!

Lin Jie quickly washed up, humming as he strolled into the kitchen. He put on an apron as he readied himself to whip up a scrumptious breakfast for Mu'en and his new tenant.

He hadn't done any household chores himself ever since taking in the reliable Mu'en.

However, years of single-hood had led to Lin Jie developing top notch culinary skills.

After placing three servings of poached eggs and vegetable toast on the mini dining table in the kitchen, Lin Jie headed over to Mu'en's room and knocked on the door. "Time for breakfast."

Lin Jie has been extremely serious about inculcating gender awareness in Mu'en.

At the beginning, Mu'en would never close the door to her room, but now she would lock her door obediently. On top of that, she would inform Lin Jie whenever she was using the bathroom to avoid any awkward incidents.

It was indeed gratifying for 'Dad' Lin Jie.

Click.

The door swung open, revealing a tiny figure that emerged cautiously who was in fact not Mu'en but a bespectacled Prima with a fuzzy, rough braid.

The young lady's face was slightly pale and seemed rather sickly. She had a pair of cotton slippers on and was wearing a white teenager nightdress — Lin Jie had seen this outfit on Mu'en previously, evidently it was shared with her by the latter.

"Good morning," Lin Jie greeted her with a cordial smile. "Slept well? Did you get along well with Mu'en?"

Prima let out an uneasy "Good, everything was good."

She proceeded to stammer, "Lady Mu'en is great and very gentle. We get along really, really well, thank you for allowing me to interact with Lady Mu'en. This is the greatest honor of my life! Thank you so much!"

Prima started to sound excited as she spoke, recalling the night spent interacting and conversing with Lady Mu'en. She subconsciously held her chest because those intense feelings had yet to subside.

That night, she learned that Mu'en had already succeeded Walpurgis's dream realm, or in other words, she would be the Primordial Witch's successor while concurrently holding the sacred role of being the moon.

An equal to Walpurgis himself.

As one of Walpurgis's anointed, this was akin to a Christian meeting with God for Prima. She was already woozy from bliss!

She was even invited into Walpurgis's dream realm; that soulful experience brought her to tears as she knelt to re-pledge her allegiance to Mu'en.

When Prima inquired about Lin Jie's identity, Mu'en's response left her speechless from shock.

— “He is my father who bestowed me with knowledge, strength, and a new life.”

She peered upwards cautiously to see an ordinary young man. It was unfathomable that he would be such an important figure.

The ‘father’ of the Primordial Witch. Prima possessed an extensive knowledge of the mystical and occult and understood right away that this wasn't the conventional meaning of what a father was but rather a concept.

Everyone knew that the Primordial Witches were born from chaos...

Prima couldn't help but blush while feeling short of breath. It was hard to imagine that she could be in the presence of such a higher being and she was stoked!

Lin Jie's face was wooden as he observed the young lady who seemed like she was smitten with someone.

Why does this conversation feel so strange? And isn't this kid a little too polite, using honorifics even for someone of her similar age?

Mu'en is very gentle? ...How is she gentle? What exactly happened between you two last night?

Together with that later sentence, isn't this a complete confession of love?

What a lass, Mu'en has really grown up...

Lin Jie felt as though he could pick up the scent of *Citrus*. (Citrus is a reference to the GL manga/anime with that title)

Find the original at **hosted** novel.

Yuri love was in the air.

“You’re welcome, you’re welcome.”

What else could Lin Jie reply, he was no feudal patriarch. With a loving and affable gaze of an elder, he raised his hand and patted Prima’s forehead. “As long as you two are happy, we’ll soon be a family.”

Prima felt the loving gaze of an old father, and her heart brimmed with reverence.

That's right. Theoretically speaking, being Lady Mu'en's family equates to being related to Boss Lin. A family indeed!

It was no surprise Walpurgis's Contractual Ring is in the hands of Boss Lin. Turns out they are a family...

Prima nodded obediently.

Lin Jie withdrew his hand and scanned the room for signs of that uncommunicative, expressionless, and unreadable assistant of his, then asked, “Where is Mu’en?”

Prima responded immediately, “Lady Mu’en went to the book cafe next door to prepare for opening. The cafe has been closed for a few days, and she wanted to tidy up the place so it can be opened and make money for her boss.”

Lin Jie was taken aback and felt deeply moved.

What a little sweetheart...

He then instructed Prima to bring over the breakfast from the kitchen to Mu'en next door.

Lin Jie had intended to do it himself initially. However, since the situation was as such, it was a good opportunity for Prima and Mu'en to foster their relationship.

After finishing his breakfast, Lin Jie headed downstairs to check on the cat.

“Meow... Meow?!”

The slumbering Whitey went into a frenzy when it was picked up.

Lin Jie stroked the cat as he brought it into his arms. Whitey slowly calmed down and became as quiet as a church mouse, subjecting itself to Lin Jie's stroking and even brushed itself against him.

He opened the door of the bookstore, taking in a deep breath of the fresh, outside air before returning to the counter to begin operations for the day.

Having delivered the food, Prima requested a pen and notebook from Lin Jie and sat beside him to read through the ***Compendium of Materia Medica***. She would periodically nod as though deeply engrossed in studying.

But after a while, her eyebrows scrunched up while appearing in deep thought. Then she would glance at Lin Jie from time to time as though she wanted to say something.

Noticing her gaze, Lin Jie broke into a smile. “Is there something that you don't understand?”

Prima's eyes lit up and she nodded. Straightening her posture, she raised her doubts earnestly, “Yes. In the book, it says that Dragons are also used for their medicinal properties. But dragons have already ceased to exist for a long time...”

Chapter 236: Medicinal Study

Chapter 236: Medicinal Study

Dragons?

Lin Jie's smile stiffened. *What the heck?*

Dragons for their medicinal properties? Did Li Shizhen have such an unorthodox philosophy?

*Did I pass her the rule book for **Dungeons and Dragons** by accident instead of **Compendium of Materia Medica** ?*

Or is this young lady trying to pull a prank on me?

No, wait.

Lin Jie watched on as Prima blinked innocently several times. He marveled at the beauty of those pure, immaculate eyes craving for knowledge.

A thirst for knowledge wasn't deceiving, so she certainly wasn't pulling his leg.

Considering the cultural differences, she must have misinterpreted something.

While maintaining his slightly stiff smile, Lin Jie started to recall relevant content from **Compendium of Materia Medica** , which he had perused many years back.

Lin Jie's memory of **Compendium of Materia Medica** had gotten hazy over the years as he had used it for some light reading back in his high school days. Fortunately, he still retained some of the content in his mind.

The corner of his lip twitched as he realized that there really was "Dragon" as a category of medicine.

So that was it.

Li Shizhen's philosophy was indeed unorthodox.

Compendium of Materia Medica was a very well-organized book.

For instance, there were categories of the five elements such as water, fire, earth, etc. And of course, most importantly, there was a section for herbs.

There was also a category for plants which was broken down into sub-categories like grain, leaves, and fruits, while the category under animals branched out into finer categories such as insects, scales, and others...

And this 'Dragon' fell under the category of 'scales.'

However, it was neither a mythical European Dragon nor the Huaxiaosaurus (Of course, no one would know Li Shizhen's thought process). Rather, it referred to fossils of mammals such as elephants, rhinoceros, horses, etc.

Lin Jie was slightly dejected. He had really given himself a false alarm. Having spent so much time in this other world, the first image that had come to his mind was a winged dragon.

It was indeed merely a misinterpretation.

Lin Jie had found the crux of the problem, but the issue still remained.

How was he going to explain to the kid?

The Huaxiaosaurus was probably a hypothesis of the ancient people based on their understanding of vertebrates. Of course, Lin Jie could lecture on and reference books after books from literature as well as research examples for hours to finally conclude that the 'dragon' in this case referred to the fossils of mammals.

But to the mortals of this world, dragons were tetra-pods with horns on their head, wings on their back, and a tail behind them.

It was an unexplored area for research, rendering it difficult for Lin Jie to explain his theory.

“Mr. Lin?”

Prima waited patiently for an answer as she noticed the young man in a state of recollection.

It's as if the term 'Dragon' reminds him of something, thought Prima.

Ancient dragons date back to the time of the Primordial Witches, during that age of chaos. Mr. Lin must have been through a lot.

Having been preoccupied with deep thoughts, Lin Jie eventually returned to reality in shock. He glanced at Prima sheepishly and cleared his throat, “I’m sorry, I was reminded of some stuff from the past.”

Deep down, Lin Jie was determined to devise an explanation to bluff his way through.

After all, how could the great Teacher Lin, dealer of chicken soup, be intimidated by a mere child? That would surely tarnish his reputation.

All of a sudden, Lin Jie eyebrows went up as he blinked a couple of times.

Wait a minute...

Although he was unable to explain this theory, he did in fact have in his possession a dragon fossil!

The fossil of the dragon heart from Cherry was still well kept in his basement.

After Lin Jie had absorbed the special power within, the heart had shriveled up and turned into a rock.

Why not just make the best out of bad misunderstanding!

Since it has already become a rock, let's just have it ground into powder and de-cocted. At most, it would just cause a stomachache if consumed and wouldn't have many other serious implications.

Furthermore, Prima was well versed in medical research and definitely more knowledgeable than him, so she probably wouldn't act recklessly.

And if it ended up ineffective, Lin Jie could conveniently claim that the specimen hadn't been preserved properly.

Lin Jie cleared his throat and explained, "Indeed, the real dragons have ceased to exist, but their fossils still exist even today. That is the portion that can be utilized for its medicinal properties."

Prima could sense something in his tone and decided to get to the bottom of it as she stared at him with excitement and intent.

Indeed, Lin Jie let out a calm smile and said nonchalantly, "In fact, I have in possession a rare dragon heart fossil. If you're keen on studying it, I would gladly give it to you. It so happens that it has no other use apart from collecting dust in the basement."

"Thank you very much! I, I don't even know how to repay you. I, If I am able to uncover any major discovery, I would definitely hand over the elixir to you if you need it!" Prima flushed, brimming with delight.

Lin Jie noticed that the usually shy and reserved girl got exceptionally excited when medical research was involved.

Haa... She's bound to be a mad scientist when she grows up.

"I'll have to trouble you then," Lin Jie chuckled.

Prima reverted back into her shy, reserved self like a mimosa as she lowered her head and murmured, "No, it's no trouble..."

"Alright, problem solved, back to the book. Focus on recovery and leave the investigation of your sister's incident to me," Lin Jie said cordially.

Prima was momentarily stunned before a pang of gratitude washed over her and she buried her reddened face into the book. She inhaled a deep breath of the book's unique scent as she calmed herself down before resuming her study.

After a while...

Prima raised her hand boldly.

"Yes, Student Prima. Go ahead." Lin Jie reacted naturally.

Prima blurted out the question that had been on her mind since she began reading the book. "Would using the likes of human skulls, placentas, and ashes for elixirs lead to any implications?"

She was evidently hesitant as it was an extremely sensitive topic.

It was as if she was questioning the moral ethics of Lin Jie.

But Boss Lin was way too affable. And on top of it all, he had the utmost trust of Walprugis' successor, Mu'en, and therefore Prima decided that she would trust him as well.

By trusting wholeheartedly, one had to be open and not hide anything.

...???

Was there really such a thing?

Lin Jie picked at his memory, trying to recall what these parts in ***Compendium of Materia Medica*** entailed.

Cranium (skull), human cells (or known as human placenta), and soil above a cremation (ashes).

They were recorded as medicine, and even the taste and ailments that they could help cure were documented... For instance, the cranium replenishes vitality, and it's based on the Chinese medical rationale that one supposedly nourishes a body part by consuming the corresponding part of an animal...

Lin Jie had always upheld the academic integrity of not blabbering on any topic he didn't have expertise on and thus said earnestly, "Let's say they were used for elixirs and really possessed the claimed medicinal properties... There wouldn't be anything wrong with that if they were acquired morally. However, if these items do not have any tangible properties and are merely used to satisfy immoral causes such as curiosity and the desire to hunt, then we should insist on abstaining from these ingredients. Is that clear?"

"Most importantly, you must have a clear conscience. Are you able to make a positive contribution to the world and create more effective elixirs to create your own value?"

Boss Lin reverted to his usual preaching and changed the topic with a heavy heart. "You have to understand that the value of everything is always ever changing. An ordinary herb may turn into a priceless treasure in your hands. And the difference lies in all the effort you've put in up till now."

Prima nodded her head as the confusion she had started to disappear.

She finally understood!

An ever-changing mysticism bestowed immense power upon higher beings, and their flesh, blood, and bones would, in the ever-changing flow, become of a greater value.

This was the contribution higher beings had to the masses.

And they, the apothecaries, were the ones to abstract this power.

Chapter 237: Cat Food Delivery

Chapter 237: Cat Food Delivery

Prima felt like she had understood completely!

Her concerns were unwarranted. In fact, she had always been too emotional. True medical research required absolute focus and a rational mind.

She should have devoted her time to studying the properties and effects of ingredients and how to use them to create more effective doses of elixirs instead of what she was doing now. She felt out of place like a clueless, lost tourist debating about the historical origins of an attraction site.

These raw materials might seem appalling, and the process of acquiring them was likely strange and gruesome. But ultimately, these were just medicinal materials.

These materials might even have been donated by noble beings with the selfless intention to make the world a better place.

Yet, she had the audacity to worry about these medicinal herbs being immoral. Now this was true disrespect!

It was plain disrespect to the contributors, researchers, and beneficiaries alike.

This was a great disrespect to the study of medicine!

Prima was still too narrow-minded and lacked foresight.

Medical research required a pious, pure, and idealistic heart, and she still had much to work on, both technically and mentally.

Prima instantly came to realize the well intentions of the young man in front of her.

All along, she had been indulging herself in her own world,

isolating herself in that small room conducting research and abstaining from interacting with anyone. She kept such a low profile that barely anyone in her clan knew her.

This was the reason she achieved tremendous success in the field of medicine, and even her sister, Margaret, marveled at her innate talent.

Margaret insisted that if Prima was willing to be officially appraised by the Truth Union, she would definitely blow away all those other self-proclaimed young geniuses.

However, at the same time, she lacked the experience to deal with problems, easily swayed by her emotions, and prone to imagining things.

These were all areas for improvement for her... She needed to bring the calm and collected Prima when it came to conducting medical research into other aspects of her life.

She just had to do it!

Prima's eyes burned bright as she nodded heavily like a chick pecking on rice.

"Thank you for your guidance! I believe I still have plenty of inadequacies and a long way to go on the road of medical research."

Phew...

Lin Jie breathed a sigh of relief as he finally managed to bluff his way through.

He had really miscalculated this time around.

Had he known this would happen, he would have picked a conventional academic book of medicine instead. While ***Compendium of Materia Medica*** was a classic, it had its own deficiencies. It was a perfectly fine read but had the chance of causing massive confusion in this other world.

But at least, under his positive guidance, it was unthinkable that the young lady would be led astray.

“Don’t hesitate to ask me if you have other questions,” Lin Jie reminded her again in a bid to reassure himself.

Prima nodded as she watched the uplifting scene of Lin Jie playing with the cat.

As she saw Boss Lin rubbing the cat’s head, she couldn’t help giving a typical smile that teenage girls had when they noticed something adorable.

But a moment later, her smile vanished and her face turned ghastly pale as she remembered that it was the very same cat which tore the dark elf stalker apart before devouring her whole.

If it was that frightening thing substituting for the chubby white cat here, this scene would no longer be heartwarming and horrifying instead...

“Speaking of it, I seem to have forgotten to get cat food... Wouldn’t Whitey be starving if he has nothing to eat?

“What should I do? If only there was a cat food delivery service, sigh...” Lin Jie muttered with a frown.

As he stroked Whitey’s bulging belly, a faint growling sound was heard.

In fact, he felt really helpless. Norzin still did not have delivery service, and it took a long time for Lin Jie to get accustomed to it when he first came.

Neither was there online shopping or other such services.

Now, when he wanted to purchase some cat food, it was quite a hassle, for he had to source for pet shops nearby before heading down in person to get it.

At times like this, he would yearn for his favorite e-commerce platform!

However, considering the amount of fat present in Whitey's soft wobbly tummy, that fat cat should be able to hold out for a while more.

Normal food should be fine too... Lin Jie mused as he watched the chubby white cat rolling about on the counter-top.

Prima shuddered and went back to concentrating on her book, feigning to be focused and pretending like she hadn't heard Boss Lin's words.

Cat food...

To this unidentified creature of horror, 'cat food' could very well be Pandemonium-rank transcendent beings.

Therefore, from what Mr. Lin's said, he probably meant that a transcendent being would be visiting the bookstore!

Prima wondered to herself, *Don't tell me there are other assassins coming?*

That uncle of hers, Jerome, was definitely incapable of assaulting and kidnapping Margaret alone. His reputation and connections within the clan weren't comparable to that of her sister. There was likely a group of people backing him.

Jerome would be sure to take further actions when he realized that the dark elf had gone off-grid.

Since the Pandemonium-rank Dark Elf Stalker had failed, he would definitely send someone much more powerful subsequently.

These people would probably be able to engage the services of a Destructive-rank...

But... Prima stole a glance at Lin Jie. *Sending any number of them here would be useless...*

With Mr. Lin around, even Destructive-ranks would surely be fodder.

We are hosted novel, find us on google.

Deep down, this young lady had already placed Lin Jie at the highest pedestal — above Supreme-rank.

Yet, the next person that passed through the bookstore's entrance was not the fiendish assassin she was expecting.

Instead, it was a courteous, striking old gentleman.

Yes, Prima was using striking to describe this tuxedo-clad, graceful old man.

He had neatly combed blonde hair and a pair of profound, deep blue eyes. With that charming gaze of his, his charisma could even match that of a young lad at the parties of the affluent young ladies.

At the same time, he exhibited a cool, collected composure of an academic and had an air of prestige.

The combination of the two seemingly contradicting characteristics created a shroud of mystery around him.

It wasn't hard to picture; he was probably a ladies' man back in his younger days.

However, as he entered the bookstore, he appeared disturbed and was cautious in his every move while struggling to put on a calm front.

It was akin to a timid man finally mustering the courage to enter the haunted house, forcing himself to enter despite being engulfed in terror.

The irony reflected on him was comedic.

Prima was taken aback when she realized that she recognized the old man — he was one of the few figures that Margaret had insisted her to remember as he could very possibly become her immediate superior in the future.

Andrew, the Truth Union's Vice-Chairman.

Prima glanced at Andrew and then Whitey as her face paled in an instant.

Could this be... the cat food delivery?

Lin Jie broke into a wide smile as he looked up. "Welcome."

Prima could seemingly sense the malice embedded within the smile.

Andrew headed straight toward the counter the moment he entered. After a deep breath, he began speaking, "You should know my intent here, I'm terribly sorry about what had happened previously..."

"Hold on."

Lin Jie maintained his smile, his eyes had a hint of confusion. "Please pardon me for my ignorance, it seems like we haven't met... You are?"

Andrew: "..."

Chapter 238: Gifting A Clock

Chapter 238: Gifting A Clock

Andrew had finally decided to visit this mysterious yet powerful bookstore owner after psyching himself up.

Deep down, he knew that this was a visit he had to pay.

But having once adopted a hostile attitude toward the bookstore and hatched a few ill-intentioned plans against the bookstore, Andrew would definitely be lying if he claimed that he wasn't worried.

He would break out in a cold sweat whenever he was reminded of his past actions.

Given whatever strength the bookstore owner by the name of Lin Jie had revealed, taking Andrew's life was probably a piece of cake for him.

Though he now understood the brashness of his past actions had been in fact a result of Jerome's manipulation and bewitchment, Andrew had the impression that this was the reason Lin Jie had never taken to heart his constant acts of animosity. It was never his true intention as his mind had been subjected to external influence.

However, Andrew had never spoken with the bookstore owner before, and these were all his conjectures.

What if Lin Jie had only been letting a 'small fry' like him off the hook for the time being and intended to get even with him at a later time?

Wouldn't he be seeking his own death by approaching the bookstore owner on his own accord now?

But Andrew had no other options.

No matter how conflicted and reluctant he was, he no longer held

any tangible power. Every one of his orders would have to be audited before they could be approved, which was utterly restraining for him.

As long as Jerome was around, he could influence the results of the investigation by bewitching the committee with his mind-influencing elixir and foiling Andrew's plans with ease.

Andrew suspected Diamante, the other Truth Union Vice-Chairman, had also been under influence by Jerome. After all, Jerome seemed to be really ambitious.

The ones supporting him from the shadows must have given him great confidence that he even harbored the delusion of trying to control the Truth Union...

And all this just had to happen when Chairwoman Maria was currently away.

Simply put, Andrew wanted to change the situation. Right now, the only way was to seek the assistance of the mighty bookstore owner.

To his horror, the bookstore owner, whom he perceived as his last hope, did not even recognize him...

Andrew fell into silence.

I'm finished , was the first thought that flashed across his mind.

Then, something clicked and his thoughts went wild. *He has the reputation of being omnipotent, yet he claims to not recognize me. He could say that he forgot who I was before I arrived, but now that I'm right in front of him, he is definitely lying to my face.*

Therefore, there's only one possibility. His feigning ignorance on purpose!

And his reason for doing so could only be —

He does not intend to accept my apology!

Andrew's heart sank.

Did I grossly misjudge the situation? He was actually offended and wanted to use this opportunity to watch me struggle in the lurch as a form of his revenge?

He couldn't help letting out a bitter smile as his thoughts fell into despair. *The wicked sense of humor befitting that of a higher being indeed...*

But... No!

A thought sparked in Andrew's head. *He just said 'welcome.' Does that mean that he isn't rejecting me? This is a sign that he is treating me as a customer!*

From another point of view, perhaps he refused my apology because he did not think that I didn't have to apologize. After all, it was all Jerome's wicked scheme and not the fault of mine...

He was speaking to me purely as a first-time customer. This must be a chance to start afresh!

And right now... he is still observing. He must be testing my sincerity. Ha-ha-ha, thankfully I did my research before coming over!

A glimmer of hope resurfaced for Andrew as his spirits were lifted in an instant. Then, he suddenly looked up in shock.

Wait a minute... is he able to tell what's going through my mind right now?

Aren't I making a fool out of myself...

Andrew appeared constipated as he tried to contain his rapidly changing expressions. As he observed Lin Jie's bemused expression, he could gradually tell that his inner thoughts were completely exposed to Lin Jie.

All his thoughts and schemes were pathetic, and even worse was his own strength.

Andrew was filled with remorse as he came to the realization of how foolish he was before.

Lin Jie had a slightly confused look on his face as he observed the silent customer before him.

Why is this customer so weird...

He didn't seem like he was here to make a purchase, and the first thing he did was to ridiculously apologize. Shortly after, his emotions seemed to go haywire as he displayed a whole range of emotions from mourning in despair to being as happy as a lark.

Clearly, he was putting on airs, and based on Lin Jie's experienced judgment, he was probably an old Casanova. But why was he acting like he was suffering from a breakdown after being ditched...

In fact, Lin Jie felt like this fellow was staring at him as though he was the discipline master in school and he had been a student caught red-handed using his phone in class.

And it so happened that he was surfing a particular website that began with "p" and was being publicly shamed on the spot.

Though it was a rather strange analogy, Lin Jie did truly sense the subtle feeling of shame and resentment from him.

"Mister?"

Lin Jie cleared his throat as he decided to first break the awkward situation and asked politely, "May I know what you were referring to? I'm not going to accept your apology if I wasn't involved."

Andrew had already calmed down at that point. Upon hearing Lin Jie's words, his eyes lit up for a moment before he put on a solemn expression.

This question... must be a test!

The bookstore owner could indeed read his mind and must have sensed his sincerity; therefore, he was offering him the opportunity to apologize and redeem himself.

If he could successfully seek forgiveness, he would naturally be in

the bookstore owner's good books.

The condition of this question was that whatever he was apologizing for had to be something to do with the bookstore owner.

And the only time there was such a thing was during Jerome's evil plot, where Andrew had direct contact with the bookstore owner bearing ill intentions. He instructed those 'Truth-Seekers' scholars to pay a visit and 'mess up' the bookstore!

With ample caution, Andrew tread lightly. "Do you still remember Hood and the gang?"

Lin Jie paused as he recalled. "Those brats who broke into my store in the middle of the night? Why... are you their father?"

"Did you specifically come here to apologize on behalf of them?"

Lin Jie had nearly forgotten that bunch, but coming here to apologize for that incident did make sense right now.

"It's like this." Andrew let out a sigh of relief upon knowing that he had passed the first round of the test. He continued, "I am the Vice-Chairman of the Truth Union. Theoretically speaking, I am their superior and Hood is the nephew of Chairwoman Maria. Therefore, it is not entirely wrong to say that they are my children."

Lin Jie nodded, indicating that he had understood.

As Lin Jie nodded, Andrew was touched that tears nearly flowed. He took a deep breath before presenting a little, exquisite enameled silver box.

"This is a gift that I have prepared for you, I hope you can forgive..."

He uncovered the lid of the silver box carefully and gently revealed what seemed like an intricate, mechanical desk clock.

Chapter 239: Clock-wheel Worm

Chapter 239: Clock-wheel Worm

Lin Jie couldn't help but wince as the quaint mechanical piece shaped like a clock was revealed.

He directed his gaze to the uneasy Andrew before glancing at the clock again.

Of all possible gifts, you chose a clock. Are you here to apologize or antagonize? Lin Jie disparaged deep down.

But of course, he kept it to himself.

After all, it was evident that Andrew was from Azir and spoke English as his native tongue. In the English context, 'gifting a clock' was not a homophone for 'attending one's funeral.'

In fact, Lin Jie usually conversed in Azir English as well and would only use Mandarin when conversing with Ji Zhixu. The books that he had distributed were all bilingual, in both Mandarin and English.

Furthermore, with Andrew's status, there wasn't any reason for him to display such humility before pulling a prank like this.

This is probably just a blunder... Wait a moment, haa... Andrew is the Vice Chairman of the Truth Union.

He must be a learned individual with extensive knowledge to be able to achieve a Vice-Chairman position in a scholarly organization such as the Truth Union. Shouldn't he possibly understand the intricacies of both languages?

Lin Jie had his suspicions, but it didn't appear to be the case from the looks of Andrew...

Boss Lin, who was doing some thinking, decided to divert his gaze

back to the gift.

The silver box was 10 centimeters wide and 20 centimeters tall. The turquoise cloisonne outer layer gave the enameled box an exquisite touch.

Even more remarkable was the contents within. Intricate silver gears interlocking on the exterior and the tightly packed layers of mechanical structure were a sight to behold.

Located on the top was a sparkling ruby dial inlaid in a pure silver frame, with the hour and minute hand moving separately. The hollow carving patterns on the dial were a testament to the exceptional craftsmanship as the details were as elaborate as an antique Chinese peach stone carving of a boat.

The staggered distribution of the ornaments within the narrow-enclosed space was spaced to perfection.

The workmanship could even be deemed godly. Together with the various inlaid gemstones and its sterling silver mainframe, anyone could tell that this was a priceless treasure.

However, there was also a peculiar hamster wheel-like fixture located at the bottom of the miniature clock.

And on that wheel component was a... caterpillar?!

Lin Jie leaned back in recoil.

Within the wheel was indeed a black caterpillar with strange white patterns on its under-body!

This bug was constantly slogging forward ever so slowly and its motion brought about the rotation of the wheel.

And as the wheel rotated, the interlocked gears sprung to life, making the clock tick along.

In other words, the miniature hamster wheel was the engine of the entire clock.

Lin Jie was absolutely stunned.

What the hell! You people with deep pockets really have some exquisite kinks! Having cats and hamsters running on wheels is no longer satisfiable so you lot turn to caterpillars?!

Even exploiting the worm's labor while toying with it... You vampiric, capitalist scums!

Not even sparing the labor of a little bug!

But I have to say...

From a collector's viewpoint, the introduction of this worm wheel makes the value of this miniature clock skyrocket! It's transitioned from a typical expensive decoration to a unique piece of exceptionally artistic imagination and craftsmanship.

In Lin Jie's opinion, that addition must have at least doubled the gift's value.

From the look of it... This is likely a customized piece probably from a specialized mechanical department in the Truth Union. It must have cost a bomb. Haa... Andrew did indeed come here with the intention to apologize.

But the gift you picked...

Never mind. Judging from your sincerity alone, I'll take it as a mere misunderstanding.

Lin Jie looked Andrew in the eyes and said, "This gift... is not too bad. I'll accept it."

His tone was still a little reluctant.

After all, being Chinese meant that he was still mindful of such implied messages. In a different circumstance, Lin Jie could have very well flipped out.

But the combination of impeccable craftsmanship and the unique concept of the worm wheel was enough to pique Lin Jie's interest.

On top of it, Andrew was rather sincere, so Lin Jie was willing to accept it.

“Phew.... That is great! Thank you for your magnanimity and leniency! I... No, Hood and the rest will be eternally grateful to you!”

Search for the original.

Andrew let out a huge sigh of relief as his racing heart finally got a chance for a rest. As his apprehension eased, he realized that his back was covered in a cold sweat.

His heart had nearly stopped when he witnessed Lin Jie's face darken.

Had the bookstore owner been displeased with the gift, Andrew was never going to walk out those doors alive.

More importantly, Andrew had no idea what had gone wrong and he was completely befuddled.

He had spent a considerable time studying all intelligence reports on the bookstore and its owner. He was convinced that Lin Jie took a particular liking of anything unique or related to the forgotten period in history.

For example, the stone gargoyle which was Wilde's masterpiece and the demon sword which was an ancient artifact that has been in existence for thousands of years.

Therefore, after much deliberation, Andrew had carefully decided that the “Clock-wheel Worm” was the most fitting gift.

Of course, the highlight wasn't the clock.

Its actual core was the caterpillar-like creature powering the clock.

The mechanical frame, and everything else, was in fact employed to facilitate controlling the worm and maximizing its power.

The power to manipulate time!

The Clock-wheel Worm was a four-dimensional transcendent creature. Onto-logically, defining it as a 'worm' wasn't accurate and it was just a convenient term.

Its current caterpillar-like appearance was just a projection of its image in three-dimensional space.

The surrounding mechanism that controlled it was passed down for generations in Andrew's family clan, which were the fruits of their relentless research over many decades.

In fact, it was his clan's secret weapon, and Andrew as the current clan chief was merely a custodian.

But in a crucial situation where his fate was on the line, Andrew naturally had to prioritize a greater interest.

Moreover, Andrew understood that after his plea for assistance, his fate would be completely intertwined with that of the bookstore, and the same could be said about his family clan.

So, why not just go all-in from the start.

This way, he could still express his sincerity and goodwill.

However, Lin Jie's initial reaction was an unexpected look of disdain... Fortunately, he ended up accepting the gift, albeit reluctantly.

Andrew let out an exhausted sigh.

He was absolutely confused why anyone would be displeased with such an invaluable gift.

As he was taking a seat to plan his next move, a horrifying thought surfaced in his mind.

Could it be... that the bookstore owner has already mastered the art of time manipulation, so upon seeing that tiny worm, he felt that this was an insignificant gift, which displeased him?

Chapter 240: Call Him Over For A Bit

Chapter 240: Call Him Over For A Bit

Andrew's mind was terrified by his latest guess.

But the more he thought about it, the more it made sense because the Clock-wheel Worm was still considered a rare class of transcendental object even from a Supreme-rank's perspective.

As a gift, it was definitely valuable enough, or at least it was of equivalence to the demon sword. The bookstore owner's reluctance definitely wasn't a result of the Clock-wheel Worm being insufficient in value.

This is absolutely the true power of laws!

The amount of power a Clock-wheel Worm could exert was completely dependent on the user's amount of aether. Due to numerous limitations, a Destructive-rank expending his full might would only manage to let it affect a small area.

Basically, it could only be used during crucial moments to save one's own life. But if the wielder was killed off before managing to activate it, then, this little thing would be useless.

Its use was really very limited.

Still, this was an artifact powerful enough to change one's fate.

Otherwise, Andrew's family would not have gone to the expense of building this device and then keeping this transcendental object as a family heirloom that was kept in secret and being passed down from each head of the family clan in succession.

But... Andrew felt that he had overlooked one thing.

And that was the bookstore owner before him. Just what sort of

domains of power did he hold and till what extent?

As Secret Rite Tower had made all information and intelligence reports concerning the bookstore to 'sealed,' whatever the Truth Union could uncover for now was only bits and pieces.

All they knew was that Lin Jie's capabilities were definitely at Supreme-rank or higher, but they didn't know anything specific; only the general description of 'omniscient and omnipotent.'

However, were there any faiths that didn't portray their god as omniscient and omnipotent?

Andrew had tried to see things from a logical point of view and didn't reckon that the bookstore owner was as powerful as claimed. There was a possibility that these were exaggerations from other customers as well as Secret Rite Tower trying to curry favor.

But now, he came to the sudden realization that although the bookstore owner wasn't at that level of omnipotence, he was surely in control of a higher domain judging from Secret Rite Tower's boot-licking attempts.

And perhaps Andrew had acted without much thought and happened to end up showing off in front of an expert...

Andrew carefully observed the expression of the young man seated across him, but he wasn't able to gain any clues.

Lin Jie eyed the Truth Union's Vice-Chairman who seemed to get weirder by the minute suspiciously, then knocked on the table. "Besides coming to apologize, is there anything else? Did you forget something?"

He suspected that there was something wrong with this Vice-Chairman, and the way he was acting now reminded him of an Alzheimer's patient that he had seen a long time ago.

Constantly looking at the other people's faces every now and then to determine if there was any issue with his memory as well as trying their hardest to remember what they were doing.

Andrew shuddered. The tension that had cooled returned once more.

This-this is a warning!

Since the bookstore owner was feeling unsatisfied with the gift he had just given, naturally, Andrew had to increase his leverage!

As if hinting at Andrew that he needed to hurry and offer his utmost sincerity!

“Books! I’d like to buy books!”

Andrew exclaimed before hurriedly adding, “I’ve heard so much about you and your bookstore, and as a scholar devoting my life to learning and a member of the Truth Union, I am filled with awe and thirst for knowledge. Therefore, I’d very much like to have your books, at any price!”

He was now completely sincere and trying his best to say nice things in hopes of becoming a customer of the bookstore.

The bookstore owner wouldn’t reject anyone who came to him for help, but the premise was to buy his books.

At the same time, only those able to get a book would get the power that they desired.

Lin Jie was momentarily stumped for a split second before his usual professional smile appeared. All hints of displeasure and hesitation vanished, his expressions switching faster than a Sichuan opera face-changing artist switch masks.

“Oh... You’re here to get books. You should have said so earlier.

“Just buy books if you are here to do so. You really didn’t have to bring a gift if that were so, you’re way too polite.

“Here, please sit.”

Lin Jie gestured to the high stool in front of the counter.

“Oh, mm.” Andrew froze for a moment, then sat down before the counter. A wave of exhilaration and ecstasy finally swept through him.

Having gone through this bumpy roller-coaster ride of ups and downs, he had finally earned the bookstore owner’s approval and gained the right to buy books.

Whether his previous mistakes could be forgiven would all depend on how he performed now.

Lin Jie shifted the box with the Clock-wheel Worm to the side and waved to Prima. “Pour us some tea.”

Prima’s injuries were already much better and walking around freely was no longer an issue.

Naturally, she came running over to help when she heard Boss Lin’s orders.

Andrew had noticed the presence of this young girl right from the start. Although he knew that this was Margaret’s younger sister, he wasn’t all too familiar with her...

No, hold on, why would Margaret’s younger sister appear here!?

Having calmed his frayed nerves, Andrew finally had the time to think about this.

Margaret was still missing, yet her sister had bizarrely appeared in the bookstore...

At that moment, Lin Jie took a cup of hot tea from Prima and pushed it over to Andrew, then asked, “Do you know who Prima’s uncle is?”

A higher-ranking executive of the Truth Union was now right in front of him, so he might as well get information directly.

Andrew was horrified. “Jerome!”

So that was it... Andrew understood that the bookstore owner

already knew the answer. He looked toward Prima's pale face and noticed that she was hurt.

That also meant that Jerome was indeed the mole and was also from the group that had attacked Margaret.

Jerome hadn't just made a move on Margaret but had attempted to kill Prima as well.

And Prima had just so happened to reach the bookstore to seek help.

That meant to say that both of them had a common enemy!

Lin Jie spoke, "Looks like you know..."

Andrew smiled grimly. "There's no need to go on. I didn't realize that he was the mole all this time. It's a failure of duty and foolishness on my part. I was influenced by him and made many mistakes in the past, but I have now repented and want to take ownership of my mistakes."

From the looks of it, Lin Jie felt he didn't need to say anything more. The Vice-Chairman before him was already aware of Jerome's offense.

And Jerome's bad deeds didn't stop at just one.

Lin Jie nodded. "Very well. I too have some things I'd like to talk to him about. Could you call him over for a bit?"

Andrew froze. "W-What do you need of him?"

With a very subdued smile, Lin Jie raised his head, gesturing at the doorway. Andrew turned to look and saw the door with an obviously patched up hole.

"I'd like to speak with him regarding compensation for this door."

"No problem!" Andrew immediately nodded his head vigorously. He was delighted.

What perfect timing. Jerome had gotten himself into trouble at the right time, so Andrew now had the opportunity to lift himself out of the bookstore's blacklist.

Now satisfied, Lin Jie continued, "I'll wait for your good news... Oh right, what sort of books are you looking for?"

"I can recommend a few books to you, such as this copy of ***The Alchemist*** . I personally really like this one..."

Chapter 241: Gate Of Truth

Chapter 241: Gate of Truth

Bam.

Lin Jie placed the book on the counter-top.

The Alchemist bore another title in Mandarin, *Young Shepherd's Fantastical Journey*. The translated one wasn't as widely known as the main title, but it was more closely accurate to the book's contents.

The story was very simple, narrating the tale of a young shepherd that dreamed of a treasure at the Egyptian pyramids and the hardships and experiences in his search where he gained a mysterious power and found love.

However, when he reached the Pyramid at long last, he wasn't able to find any treasure. Eventually, he realized that the treasure was in the abandoned church where he first had the dream.

This was an extremely allegorical classic, where anyone, regardless of whichever stage they were in life, could interpret different truths and gain different inspiration from it.

It could be considered a good read for all ages.

In other words, this book could sell well, and most people would be open to reading it when recommended.

Lin Jie would generally choose bestsellers for customers he didn't know well and had difficulty providing the right remedy for their problems.

Moreover, the Vice-Chairman seemed like he had a bumpy fate. As a folklorist, Lin Jie knew a little about Chinese physiognomy.

A darkened glabella. Surely things haven't been going well for him recently and he needs some positivity to perk him up...

“There is a type of language in the universe understood by everyone, yet it’s already been forgotten.”

With a meaningful look, Lin Jie pointed at the cover and said, “This book is about that type of language, and all the answers you seek can be found inside.”

The author of *The Alchemist* wasn’t really writing about actual alchemy but instead referring to the ‘alchemy of mind and life.’

In fact, the forgotten language that this book intended to convey was the philosophy of the heart.

Of course, that wasn’t how to sell books. Lin Jie couldn’t just go up to Andrew and say that he was selling chicken soup for the soul; there needed to be some suspense.

“A language of the universe...” Andrew was already on the edge of his seat when he saw the title, *Gate of Truth*. When he heard what Lin Jie last said, his entire body started to tremble.

Like a pilgrim on a journey of spiritual awakening, he took a deep breath, then stretched out his fingers to touch the contours of the book.

Alchemy!

Alchemy!

This was the true meaning of alchemy. It was the language of the universe!

Just as the bookstore owner had said, this was a book for alchemists!

Andrew’s full name was Andrew Russell.

His last name and the family clan he was from were famous for alchemy.

Furthermore, although Andrew dabbled in many other fields, all of it paled in comparison to his achievements in alchemy.

Before becoming Vice-Chairman, Andrew had been the former Head of Alchemy at the Truth Union.

However, at that time, none of the Russell family's scholars within the Truth Union were as accomplished in alchemy as Walter, the current Head of Alchemy. Thus, Andrew could only give up his position to the latter.

For that reason, the relationship between Andrew and Walter wasn't that harmonious.

The Clock-wheel Worm was a work of their family's alchemy, and the ruby plate on the device was made of the purest philosopher's stone they could synthesize at present.

Most of the energy consumed during equivalent exchange for the control of time came from the philosopher's stone.

Andrew's eyes were fixed on the book in front of him as if in some sort of trance.

His thoughts were running rampant, his cells were screaming, his instinct as an alchemist told him that this book contained the answer to his lifelong pursuit!

"Can I open it and have a look?"

Before he knew it, Andrew's voice had become soft, cautious, filled with pleading and eagerness. His gaze locked on to the book as if it was the most precious treasure in the world.

His heart was pounding and his mouth parched. Right now, he was even more nervous than when he had his first love affair with a certain lady back in his youth.

No one else could understand. If this was the end goal that all alchemists sought, they could abandon everything else just for it.

Every scholar was in the pursuit of truth. Though they might have their own paths and propositions, they were all searching for the truth of the world and the universe.

Find the original at Hosted Novel.

This was the reason the Truth Union was established and its vision pursued diligently.

But now, Andrew had a vague feeling that the truth was being placed before him ever so casually.

How absurd...

Andrew didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He had wondered why a proud man like Wilde would sell his soul to the bookstore, how Joseph could forgo his own personal vendetta and pay such great respect to it. Even Secret Rite Tower had suspended its cooperative partnership with the Truth Union with regards to the investigation of it.

He was also unable to understand the Church of the Dome's collapse and the establishment of the new faith that was influenced by the bookstore; because even other stronger Supreme-ranks could also accomplish such deeds. It was just a matter of how much effort they wanted to expend.

But he suddenly understood when the bookstore owner placed the book in front of him.

What if all that one was pursuing in their entire life was just akin to a random book that could be conveniently picked out?

When all that one believed in crumbled, what else could they rely on?

"Of course." Lin Jie pushed the book over and said matter-of-factly, "Books are meant to be read. I think this book was meant for you. Perhaps it can help you with your recent predicament."

Boss Lin flashed a kindly smile.

You'll have to buy it once you read it... Hehe, one look and I can tell he's a customer with a fat wallet and regards his reputation highly. If he wants to leave a good impression, he has to buy it even if he's unwilling to do so.

Andrew was stunned.

What a generous gift... This was what it meant by 'the truth is selfless.'

"Don't you believe me?" After noticing Andrew's frozen expression, Lin Jie took a long sip of tea and assumed that Andrew must have been skeptical of what he had just said.

Thus, Lin Jie continued to dupe him with a brilliant smile, "Just as this book reveals, once you make a decision, you have actually fallen into a great current that takes you to a place you never thought of when making the decision. The experiences of all the people in the world are connected through this current.

"That's why we can know everything, because everything is destined."

With his enigmatic smile, Lin Jie continued on, "Today, when you see this book, you are actually facing a choice at the crossroads of destiny. And you will know whether your choice was right or wrong one day in the future."

Although his choice of words were filled with ambiguity, the person who heard this would surely hesitate for a moment.

He might regret for a while if he bought it, or he might regret for a lifetime if he didn't.

The inner scale of balance within his heart would tilt, making him think that since it wasn't expensive anyway, he might as well buy and give it a try.

Andrew swallowed. Fate did seem to have diverged into two paths before him.

He shut his eyes and extended a trembling hand to flip the book open.

"I think I won't regret my choice today," he whispered.

Chapter 242: All Things Are One

Chapter 242: All Things Are One

With a deluge of complicated feelings, Andrew flipped the cover of the book, bracing for his destiny.

His fingers came into contact with the cover and the pages as he lifted the book gradually. Though the book was light, Andrew felt an immense pressure weighing on him.

The formless pressure came surging from all directions—from gazes within the void, from the eternal stars in the firmament...

Andrew was fear-stricken. Chaotic screams thundered in his mind as his temple throbbed. An impending sense of danger beat against his heart and mind vehemently as dancing shadows surrounded him.

Thump! Thump! Thump!

His heart pounded with each contraction. His entire body was visibly shaking as he violently gasped for air as if he were drowning.

“Huff... Huff...”

It felt nothing like flipping open a thin book.

Rather, he felt like he was unlatching the gates suppressing the forbidden truth.

Andrew was sweating profusely as he stared with dread at the contact point between the book and his hands. As the page gradually separated from the cover, Andrew could feel his strength being siphoned into the book.

At this moment, he was already past the point of no return.

Indeed, there was no way of going back and no way of stopping now!

Andrew realized that he was no longer in control of his body. His arm seemed to gain a life of its own and was on the verge of opening the book.

The pages flipped open as various warped and forbidden runes burst out like a sandstorm. Andrew felt as though he was trapped in a storm of “knowledge.”

The gale raged on like a torrent of blades piercing through his mind. His body recoiled in defiance as the urge to scream and escape further intensified.

No, no! Argh!!!

Andrew involuntarily let out silent screams as pain and hysteria tore away his sanity.

He could feel his consciousness drifting, twisting, and stretching as he transcended over countless bizarre worlds. A door opened before him as blinding light escaped through the gap like a halo originating from a source deep in the darkness.

A mere peek through the gap of this door was enough to shatter his soul.

Andrew's gaze was fixed on the surface of the halo which was transmitting large amounts of information. Overloaded with information, he swelled up in an instant and a destructive explosion shortly followed.

Because his thoughts were entangled within the storm of “knowledge,” instead of perishing, Andrew's soul converged with the storm...

And he was gradually reborn.

Everything occurred on the level of his mind, thoughts, and soul. Hence, on the surface, Andrew appeared to be merely flipping through the pages frantically as he fell silent.

His head drooped lower, and his eyes turned lifeless.

However, something slowly sparked, deep within his pupils... an endless circle with neither origin nor end.

Five minutes passed.

“Mr. Lin, is Vice-Chairman Andrew alright?”

Prima, feeling increasingly uneasy, could no longer suppress her question. She glanced at the back of the strangely silent Andrew who was sitting at the counter.

In fact, she had witnessed the Vice-Chairman, whom her sister spoke about in high regard, spasm abnormally five minutes ago. It didn't seem like a usual cramp but rather seemed as if some sort of incredible force was weighing down on him as he struggled with his all...

Even more unnerving were the twisted, thick veins and growth-like bulges protruding at his shoulder beneath his suit.

As if some sort of monster had entered his body.

“Shh...”

Lin Jie immediately raised his finger, signaling Prima to remain silent as he gave her an annoyed look.

Prima, slightly taken aback, swiftly covered her mouth with her hands.

After ensuring that Andrew wasn't interrupted did Lin Jie beckon toward Prima before he got up and moved to the side.

Prima followed him apprehensively.

With a baffled look, Lin Jie said, “Didn't you see him being engrossed in the book? Can there even be anything wrong?”

Prima stared at Lin Jie's nonchalant demeanor, then thought about the strange state of Andrew's body, and her doubts started to

deepen.

Mr. Lin had ties with Walpurgis who controls the night, or was possibly even a being that exceeded her status.

But this... didn't guarantee that he would be a conventionally 'kind' person.

Given how Andrew was acting today, he had probably irked Mr. Lin previously which explained him visiting to apologize. Thus, it was well understandable if Mr. Lin was giving him a slight punishment.

That was what Prima attempted to convince herself with.

"It's a done deal... Academics, being academic, are naturally lovers of books that can grasp the essence within the pages. See that fascinated look of his? It's as if he's being devoured by the book. No wonder Hood and those other brats came and attempted to steal some," said Lin Jie with a broad smile as he eyed Andrew, who was evidently indulging himself in the book.

"So the Truth Union is actually a truly large clientele. Should I continue building on it and take down the entire Truth Union?" muttered Lin Jie to himself. (Lin Jie means taking the entire Truth Union's patronage in this case)

A cold shiver ran down Prima's spine.

Devoured by the book?

Taking down the entire Truth Union?

Oh my gosh... What exactly is Mr. Lin up to? This feels like a really fearsome plan...

Wait a moment, I've heard everything, what am I to do?

Will I be silenced?!

The raven-haired young lady's face paled as she stared at Lin Jie in terror.

Lin Jie glanced at her and thought to himself in bemusement that his manner of tone might have been a little too much for the kid. Consequently, he reached out to pat Prima's head and said warmly, "I'm sorry if I have frightened you. I was being a little too hasty. After all, the bookstore rarely has customers so I've got to be a bit more efficient in grabbing opportunities."

Prima watched the warm smiling face of Lin Jie and gulped. She hurriedly shook her head. "No, no..."

I didn't see anything!

Although Lin Jie felt this kid was acting strange, he decided to put his concerns to rest since she insisted that she was fine.

He instructed Prima to bring over a pot of hot water as he resumed his position at the counter.

Andrew seemed to have broken out from his dazed state as he flipped the remaining pages of the book slowly, his eyes filled with devout determination and... fervent passion.

"How do you feel?"

Lin Jie sat down and asked eagerly.

"Never been better." Andrew's sight was locked onto the book in his hand. "I seem to have understood, yet it feels like I have not."

"That's perfectly normal. The contents of the book should be savored and deliberated unhurriedly."

That goes without saying. What would I have to sell if you could grasp it immediately?

With a smile, Lin Jie hinted, "For instance, the book mentions that there is another form of communication besides words.

"If you can master this form of nonverbal communication, the world would be yours to interpret.

"Do you know what it is?"

This novel is available on Hosted Novel.

Looking straight at Lin Jie, Andrew recited it word by word, “All things are one... One as all, all as one.”

Chapter 243: Equivalent Exchange

Chapter 243: Equivalent Exchange

All things as one—

This simple phrase was the message Andrew received from beyond that door.

Yet, within this short phrase contained the essence of alchemy, the language of the universe.

At this moment, he felt like a newborn. Everything he thought he knew about the world underwent a radical change.

The storm that had engulfed him had blown away all the dirt of his past, bringing forth a completely new, perfect, and stronger version of himself.

The increase in strength was not merely physical but rather an intrinsic confidence, with an unprecedented sense of control.

Through his eyes, the flow between everything became ever so apparent. Inseparable bonds that were formed between every matter.

And these bonds were now in Andrew's control.

He had the feeling that he could break, destroy, and rebuild these bonds at his own pleasure.

To put this sensation in words, it was akin to turning into a 'god' capable of controlling all matter.

The old Andrew would be inextricably obsessed with the feeling of being almighty, causing his ego to inflate while losing his mind and eventually straying into an unpredictable direction.

But now, he was exceptionally calm. In fact, he didn't have a single shred of emotion over this change.

The intense anxiety and pious passion of the present moment was all solely due to the young man before him. The one who had bestowed this gift.

Andrew stared at Lin Jie in reverence.

If not for the remaining strand of rationality reminding him that Mr. Lin enjoyed being treated like an ordinary bookstore owner, he would have proclaimed "All is one, one is all" at the top of his lungs before kneeling on the ground and kissing the earth before Mr. Lin as a pledge of fealty.

"Great... Not bad, just what I expected from a scholar. You've gotten a precise understanding of the book's philosophy and managed to pick out the key phrases in such a short time. That's some efficiency." Lin Jie nodded as he praised Andrew gleefully.

"All things are one" was naturally the answer to his question, and it also happened to be a quote from The Alchemist.

From the beginning, he had been using the quote and philosophy from the book to guide Andrew. This would create a 'Eureka!' moment when the latter read the corresponding line in the book.

This sentence, including "All is one, one is all" was a description of alchemy.

Alchemy is discussed throughout the entire book as a topic of mysticism, and more importantly, metaphorically.

Of course, everyone had their own interpretation.

One could even interpret it as 'All objects in the universe are closely intertwined. So we must protect the environment else retribution would come someday.'

Of course, everyone has their own interpretation.

No matter the interpretation, one first had to seek this key phrase

within the book.

“You are flattering me, I did nothing. It was entirely your generous gift which allowed me to acquire such invaluable knowledge.”

Andrew continued on with remorse and humility, “I would still be living in darkness otherwise, unable to see this never-seen-before light ahead of me.”

His line of thought had undergone a drastic change, yet he didn't feel anything off and was in fact proud of this change.

From Andrew's point of view, the young man before him was omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. His greatness was indescribable yet fitting of the comparisons to a god.

Without a doubt, he was just but a servant of this great existence.

For him, Andrew would give up everything!

Lin Jie responded with a smile. “Well said. I've always felt that one would only achieve greatness through being studious. I could not have sold it to a more suitable customer than a studious person like yourself. I believe that you would surely discover some life-changing ‘alchemy’ from within it.”

Boss Lin patted Andrew's shoulder as he intentionally emphasized the word ‘sold.’

All the crap before this point was mere obfuscation. Lin Jie was still lingering over the term, ‘generous gift’ that Andrew had used — *Does this guy have the intention of free-riding?*

Lin Jie's gaze instantly became more piercing.

He eyed Andrew closely and added, “But before that, I've to tell you that knowledge isn't free. Everything has a price.”

Andrew slightly shivered as he was reminded of the limitless light.

It was as though the old Andrew had returned for a brief moment. Everything from the past was so vivid yet felt separated by a layer

of fog as it gradually distanced from him.

He had already understood. The true essence of alchemy —
Equivalent exchange.

“All things are one” meant that everything within the universe obeyed the law of conservation. Andrew would have to pay a price of the same magnitude for whatever great power he acquired.

Perhaps... it would be with his life.

But, so what about it?

Andrew broke into a smile. This was exactly what he wanted!

What was he left with after a life of extravagant living and high authority? His lover had betrayed him and framed him under Jerome’s bewitchment, his authority was deprived by Diamante, and he had even nearly lost his own freedom.

It was all absolutely meaningless!

He was going to pursue the sole eternity in the world because he had already witnessed the light behind the door.

“I understand... and I would not be stingy with my repayment. It is what I ought to do and what I must do,” Andrew said in relief.

What’s with his sudden realization? Lin Jie gave him a weird look.

Why does Andrew appear as if he was willing to give me his life, even though I didn’t ask that of him?

Was my chicken soup that potent? Or has this classic given him some sort of enlightenment?

Never-mind, it’s fine as long as he’s willing to pay.

Lin Jie thought to himself with a shake of his head.

The moment he had long awaited arrived, and he took out his register book and pen.

With a brilliant smile, he said, “Thank you for your patronage, 45 dollars please.”

The chilling winds blew off Michael’s hood, revealing a handsome face and blonde hair that danced in the wind.

His white robe fluttered, and the crimson cross sword in his hand cut into the sturdy black frozen soil incisively as he journeyed across the ridge with grace.

Deep layers of snow covered the mountain range like layers of dragon scales. The howling wind blew through the clouds but was unable to disperse the dense gray fog shrouding the mountain. As moisture within the fog condensed, lightning crackled and a giant cyclone soon emerged which made the gargantuan mountain appear minuscule in comparison.

This novel is available on Hosted Novel.

Michael had a radiant, piercing gaze as he raised the cross sword, channeling a beam of light into the ground.

It was as if a bolt of lightning had struck.

Crash!!

Ice exploded into a mist as the frozen ground cracked in unison, breaking off. With a thunderous rumbling, massive boulders began to tumble down.

“Wake up, Giant King!” Michael roared.

The mountains thundered as a violent shaking erupted. An enormous palm emerged from beneath the ground, followed by a gargantuan body.

This was the Kingdom of Giants — Augustus.

Chapter 244: Fear

Chapter 244: Fear

Rumble...

Boulders tumbled, glaciers collapsed. The entire mountain range unleashed a deafening roar as the titanic giant broke free from the mountain and sat up.

At this point it became apparent that the mountain range was in fact a throne and the giant was currently leaning on it, in a seemingly contemplative posture.

Perhaps he had been deep in thought for far too long that the throne turned into permafrost as he was enfolded within the elements of nature and became one with the mountains.

Only now was he finally awakened.

Evidently, Michael had come prepared. He was standing right at the edge of the throne, on the ridge with the least debris.

Although some of the boulders crashed right into him, they were disintegrated by the light emanating around him. He held his position, motionless, allowing his white robe and blonde hair to dance freely in the wind.

He looked upwards at the awakened giant and called out, "Augustus, do you know why I'm here?"

Slater Augustus.

'Ancient King of Sacred Sound,' 'Black Emperor,' 'Dragon Linguist,' 'Last Descendant of Giants'—these were all titles given to him.

He had even more ridiculous appellations due to how long he had been around, but these few were the most representative.

He was also known as the Kingdom of Giants to some because he

had already fused with his throne, which was also the last territory of the Kingdom of Giants.

In the Northern highlands, within the mountain ranges bordering the Wall of Fog, he alone was a kingdom.

Of course, this title implied that Augustus possessed the strength to match an entire kingdom.

As one of the only three Supreme-ranked black magicians recorded in history, there was no doubt about Augustus's power. Besides being well-versed in magic, him being a giant provided an additional edge of exceptional physical abilities.

In fact, he was said to be a Supreme-rank with no shortcomings.

Although the grading list of the Truth Union didn't rank individuals, Augustus was widely considered by many to be the strongest of all.

However, to Michael, this was a hilarious take.

Augustus was undoubtedly formidable, but the Path of the Flaming Sword had no lack of powerhouses able to hold their own.

Just that it wasn't known to many.

Even Michael himself had the confidence to defeat Augustus—with the pretext of advance preparation, expending all, and being mentally prepared to face death.

However, old beings like him cherished their lives. None of them would be keen for a fight to the death with someone of an equivalent rank. Such a foolish act was a losing deal and absolutely pointless.

But who would have imagined coming across that terrifying fellow...

Michael couldn't help but be reminded of his recent encounter. Although it had just been a clone sent to the bookstore, he was still unable to shake off the feeling of being completely dominated.

“Oh... Michael?”

The giant who had awoken from his slumber within the mountain range called out with a deep voice resembling the low pitch of a pipe organ as it dispersed the surrounding clouds.

He blinked his eyes, and plenty of rocks, trees, and soil fell.

His eyes were profound like an obsidian, brimming with wisdom as they reflected the tiny white-robed person with blonde hair before him.

As Augustus moved his head, the crown he wore revealed itself.

The crown was black like a charred piece of wood, and the cracks on it flickered as though on fire.

Augustus did a little recalling and remembered that he had dozed off after pondering about a really boring spell just after he had sent off his previous disciple...

And this slumber went on for a full thirty years.

As he recalled, the little fellow named Wilde had probably found an extraordinary place within the trajectories of fate.

That tiny pebble after being cast off had created ripples in succession.

He soon realized that this old friend standing before him bore the ‘stains’ of fate as well. With a smile, Augustus asked, “Did you wake me up just to show me your pathetic beaten-up state?”

Augustus pretended to ponder, chuckling slightly before giving an earnest comment, “I must say, it was certainly entertaining.”

Michael knew that Augustus was aware of his clone’s encounter. Despite knowing the nature of the giant, his face sullen-ed as he was reminded of that unpleasant experience. “Cut your terrible humor. I almost forgot that I cannot beat around the bush with you.”

He knocked his crimson cross against the ground and questioned, "Who exactly is that bookstore owner?"

"I have no idea," Augustus replied with a shake of his head.

Michael retorted in disbelief, "No idea? The gargoyle definitely belongs to you, right?"

Support us at Hosted Novel.

"It is my previous disciple's masterpiece, pretty good eh?" Augustus seemed to be reveling in nostalgia.

Michael stared at him. "That was before your slumber, which was at least thirty years ago? You definitely saw the final direction he was headed through the gargoyle.

"I'm not familiar with measuring the trajectories of fate. To me, when my clone entered the bookstore, the threads of destiny within that bookstore were invisible. But, you probably saw me through the gargoyle and I don't believe that you had nothing to do with this.

"Furthermore, the bookstore owner appears to have connections with the Ancient Dragon, Bakak. Surely, you know that fellow?"

In the face of Michael's questioning, Augustus replied with a slight smile, "Bakak is dead."

"I personally experienced the Calamity Dragon's aura. You probably saw that, right? It was 'certainly entertaining' indeed."

He was implying that Bakak wasn't dead, or rather, the one who died wasn't Bakak but someone who assumed that identity.

Augustus adjusted his posture. "Bakak is indeed dead. But, he was once an anointed of Witch Silver. After death, he became a tree in her icy frost dream realm. He had a good death."

Michael's eyes narrowed.

"So," Augustus continued, "He isn't associated with Bakak but

rather with the Primordials.”

Michael’s heart started to race. When he founded the Path of the Flaming Sword, the thing he was most afraid of was the Primordial Witch of the dream realm awakening... This was because he wanted to pry open the dream realm, which was the exact opposite of what the Primordial Witch did back then.

In the end, the Witches didn’t awaken, but a more malicious being with apparent ties to the Witch emerged instead.

“You are saying, he is sent by the Witches...”

“I don’t know,” August denied immediately.

He then let out a purposeful sigh. “You were right about something. I did in fact see the threads of destiny via the gargoyle, but that was where I stopped. I wanted to let my disciple take his own course, so I did not look into it any further.”

He could have, but he didn’t.

It definitely wasn’t because the Ancient King of Scared Sound lacked a curious heart.

But rather, it was because of... fear.

Michael was at a loss for words, and a shiver went down his spine at that instant.

“Also—”

Augustus extended his hand and pointed afar. “One of your fellow angel comrades seems to think that not cooperating with that bookstore owner is a good idea. Aren’t you going to stop him?”

Chapter 245: Godspeed

Chapter 245: Godspeed

Michael's gaze followed the direction of Augustus's finger for a brief moment, then frowned. "Raziel?"

He was unable to clearly perceive the destinies of those of an equal rank. Furthermore, going against that bookstore owner who was detached from fate meant that the original trajectory had been botched and had become extremely blurred.

He only had an uncanny feeling that the one Augustus was referring to was his fellow comrade who was researching homunculi.

This gave Michael a headache.

He vaguely realized that his comrades were inevitably being drawn and converging to the bookstore — Michael himself was no exception.

As a high-ranked who had grown weary of observing and manipulating the destiny of others, Michael knew very well that this was a peculiar situation.

The founding members of the Path of the Flaming Sword were all ancient Supreme-rank beings that had existed for ages. Their level of mysticism had long surpassed 99% of transcendent beings in the world. Yet now, they were like droplets of water in a funnel, gravitating toward the hole in the center — the bookstore owner.

There were only two possibilities.

The first was that the bookshop owner far exceeded their collective mysticism, drawing them irresistibly closer in the trajectories of fate.

The second possibility was that the bookstore owner was deliberately plucking their threads of destiny as part of his plan,

similar to what Michael had done in the past.

Michael was more inclined to the latter.

Because when his clone was at the bookstore, he witnessed the bookstore owner casually revealing all the code-names of all ten members of the Path of the Flaming Sword.

That was an absolute secret! Even the original members themselves were unaware of the code-names of others!

Till now, Michael had to be the sole point of contact between collaborating parties within the Path of the Flaming Sword. Among these people, some were eccentric, some were extreme, and some were uninterested in the identity of the other members.

They had merely created a false sense of unison by all operating under the Path of the Flaming Sword's banner. In fact, the upper echelons of the organization were exceptionally fragmented.

Unity held no purpose to them. After all, their individual abilities were more than enough to crush anything in their paths.

That, however, was in the past...

When up against the bookstore owner, even Supreme-ranks appeared to be as fragile as a newborn child.

Michael getting absolutely walloped was understandable since he had been using a clone to test waters. Yet, Gabriel had gone up against the bookstore owner in his true, physical form.

Though Michael had forecast Gabriel's fate of an eventual death and intended to recruit Lin Jie as a replacement for that code-name before that, Gabriel being eliminated without accomplishing anything had been way beyond his expectations.

Perhaps, the long established Church of the Dome would follow suit and be thoroughly wiped out, and be assumed by the Sun's Faith. Evidently this had all been Lin Jie's plan.

Moreover, from his conversation with Augustus and Lin Jie's

familiarity with the ten code-names, Michael had reasons to suspect that Lin Jie was in fact an emissary sent by the Primordial Witches to prevent them from prying open the dream realm fissure.

If that's so... the probability of successfully recruiting him is close to none,

Despite thinking this way, Michael's gaze turned even more resolute.

This novel is available on Hosted Novel.

Primordial Witches, so what? They constructed the Wall of Fog to isolate the dream realm yet chose to hide there... This clearly proves that my path is the right one; the dream realm is the true land of divinity. We lost the opportunity to embark on this path due to our initial fear of the dream realm back then, but now we have to claim that opportunity for ourselves.

Lin Jie... Even Augustus is unable to detect his strength. Seems like the Path of the Flaming Sword can no longer persist as it was before. We must stand united!

Michael gazed into the distance, his expression unreadable.

Right now, the odds were stacked against Raziel who was gravitating toward the bookstore...

He could sense Raziel's destiny had gotten blurry. Shortly after, he turned back. "Giant King, would you be keen to join us?"

Augustus guffawed and the entire mountain range shook violently. "Have you given up that angel comrade of yours?"

The word "comrade" was being stressed upon sarcastically.

Augustus understood that Michael had already made up his mind to forsake Raziel. This would open up a vacancy among the ten positions, which was the reason behind this invitation to the Giant King, Augustus.

Michael, seemingly unaffected, replied, "Since even you are afraid

of snooping on him, we do not stand a chance against the bookstore owner with our individual strength. Raziel's fate is sealed and we should not expend any more resources.

"There are bound to be sacrifices on the path of realizing our ideals, don't you think so?"

Augustus stopped laughing and cast a dark look at Michael. "Old friend, do you really think that your ideals are right?"

"Of course, they are. I stand by my answer to you many years back," Michael responded without hesitation.

"Just because you came across that book at the fringes of the underground dream realm?" asked Augustus.

"Isn't that book sufficient?" Michael retorted indignantly.

He opened his arms and, in slight revel, argued, "Everything that was described in the book was a totally new world. Heaven, Eden, God, Angels, Kabbalah... which were all unheard of. The realm beyond the physical world... That must be the dream realm's path to divinity!"

Smiling weakly, Augustus replied, "In that case, I have answered your question many years back as well — I am the Giant King, the eternal king. This spot marks my kingdom, and I will neither leave this place nor join the ranks of anyone."

Michael yanked his crimson cross from the ground and scoffed, "Reclusivity... might not necessarily be a good idea."

"The dream realm fissure has already been enlarged by us. It is only a matter of time before the Wall of Fog collapses. Till the next time we meet." Michael gradually disintegrated into light and completely vanished.

Augustus let out a heavy sigh as he watched Michael vanished.

Behind the giant's throne, were the high Wall of Fog that enclosed the entire Azir. Should the high walls crumble, the darkness from the dream realm would engulf him first.

Rumble...

As the mountain peak continued to crumble, Augustus's lower body on the throne was revealed. Even his shriveled flesh had already attached itself to the throne and the mountains.

The giant had been reduced to skin bones. As he sighed, his aged eyes betrayed him. He appeared like just a gaunt old man.

As a giant, he had already lived for far too long...

Augustus extended his fingers and wrote some words in the air, conjuring a winged-envelope. He then removed the gemstone from the ring on his finger and placed it inside. With a frail smile, he set the envelope on its path. "Godspeed, my final disciple."

"Margaret's sister approached the bookstore for help?"

Raziel adjusted his golden spectacles resting upon his nose ridge, listening to the trembling Jerome's report. With a wave of his hand, the mirror before him revealed an image resembling the vicinity of the bookstore.

Yet, his gaze was fixated on the neighboring cafe.

Through the glass mirror, the young lady appeared busy inside, but to Raziel, she resembled a stunning red gem.

"Clay Idol S-277?"

Chapter 246: Curiosity Killed The Cat

Chapter 246: Curiosity Killed The Cat

“Clay Idol S-277?”

Raziel muttered the serial number as his gaze remained fixated on the young lady in the book cafe. Her eyes shone like an emerald, radiating a strange glow through the glass.

Based on her appearance, the young lady had the quality of a daffodil, silent yet exquisite. When transcendent beings looked at her, she was like the giant moon hanging in the sky, commanding the attention of everyone despite not making a sound.

But in the eyes of Raziel, it was all different.

He pinched the edge of his spectacles and gently twirled the knob of a tiny button, and some densely packed golden patterns appeared on the surface of the lenses momentarily before disappearing.

His field of vision refreshed, and the young lady he was seeing now appeared as she had been a few months prior.

Her customized service uniform transformed into a simple shirt. Her hair was wet and her entire body was wrapped in bandages with an obviously blood-soaked portion at her nape.

“Interesting...”

Once again, Raziel made adjustments to the button on his spectacle frame and the scene before him continued to rewind.

The bandages around the young lady’s neck gradually loosened and the blood slowly cleared. Her flesh gradually restructured, her skin regenerated, and the serial code S-277 resurfaced on her smooth, fair nape.

Raziel beckoned with a hand as he wrote down the serial code on a piece of paper.

“Scan this serial and retrieve all relevant information regarding project ‘Clay Idol,’ ” instructed Raziel as he handed the slip to Jerome.

“Yes, Lord Raziel!”

Jerome took the paper and got to work immediately, grabbing the scanner at once and starting the scanning as they were located within a well-equipped laboratory.

Beep, Beep!

The computer linked to the scanner began flashing experimental data and security camera footage.

The experimental data of the ‘Clay Idol’ project was basically classified. But with Jerome as the mole, he had facilitated the destruction of a few factories and stolen the two most complete artificial specimens. On top of that, he had even managed to port the entire database over.

“Filter for footage of S-277. Also, consolidate her experimental data on a graph, you know what to do,” Raziel gave out more instructions.

Naturally, Jerome knew what to do.

Though he neither specialized in mechanics nor alchemy and he hardly understood the data, Jerome would undergo repeated testing and record the data whenever he experimented with new arcanum medicine.

This was something fundamental for any legitimate scholar.

However, under ordinary circumstances, these were usually errands done by an assistant or an apprentice...

Jerome didn’t say anything and continued to carry out his task silently.

In front of Raziél, he was akin to an errand boy or perhaps even more inferior, probably possessing just slightly more intelligence than a cleaning robot.

After all, Raziél was the lifelong idol of all scholars, the founder of all knowledge they studied.

Introductory textbooks, regardless of discipline, had his renowned quote on the first page together with an abstract, distorted illustration of him staring right into the reader's soul.

That deathly stare became the stuff of nightmares for many young scholars when they woke up in the middle of the night.

The fundamental theories in most disciplines nowadays had all been proposed by Raziél. He had seemingly managed to advance the status of scholars among transcendent beings single-handedly.

If all these seemed too exaggerated for one to grasp the status and prowess of the man.

Then, there was one bit of trivia that had to be mentioned—

The steel structures housing the enormous city of Norzin were designed and constructed by none other than Raziél himself.

Find the original at Hosted Novel.

In other words...

“Ethereal Wisdom,” “Leader of Scholars,” “Iron Mentor” Grantham Ymir.

Jerome operated the computer, slowly organizing the data as he heaved a silent sigh of relief.

He had rushed here filled with apprehension to report the situation to Raziél after instructing Andrew to buy some time for him. There was no way to cover up his mistake this time. The best he could do now was to make amends while preparing himself to face punishment.

Yet, at this moment, Lord Raziel appeared to be captivated by the bookstore assistant.

“But truth be told, this bookstore assistant turning out to be the missing S-277 is unexpected...” muttered the slightly taken-aback Jerome.

Jerome was a little shocked.

Just a few months back, Jerome seized the opportunity during the chaos caused by the Magic Ovum Mirror and used ‘Spiritual Touch’ to influence a factory worker to detonate a full batch of unstable philosopher’s stone.

He had then aided members of the Path of the Flaming Sword to steal two of the most complete specimens from the facility. Yet, after tabulation, another one of the homunculi was found to be missing.

Initially, the assumption was that another party was involved or the homunculus had been too close to the detonation zone and was destroyed in the blast.

Yet, no one had imagined it becoming the mysterious bookstore owner’s assistant.

From the looks of it, S-277 could very well be the perfect specimen. She had deliberately hidden herself from the beginning, leading to a discrepancy of the experiment’s results.

Jerome sneaked a cautious peek at Raziel’s back and the image on the mirror, thinking to himself, *Lord Raziel isn’t pleased with those two specimens. He would want to recover S-277 at all costs now that he has discovered her.*

I was unable to stop Prima from seeking refuge at the bookstore, resulting in unnecessary problems since the bookstore was bound to be against us. But with the discovery of S-277, I’ve atoned for my mistakes...

“Since Lord Raziel is interested, you’ll be dead meat once he makes his move, regardless of the bookstore!” Jerome chuckled with secret

delight.

He couldn't help daydreaming. If things went smoothly, he would have rendered a meritorious service. He could very well fulfill his long-held ambition and take charge of the entire Truth Union...

Jerome wasn't being delusional. The Truth Union had already been infiltrated with Lord Raziel's underlings long before him, manipulating its every move for years. Otherwise, how could they have completed the homunculus project in such a short period of time just based on the abilities of the scholars alone?

Lord Raziel was merely using the Truth Union's resources to realize his own plans.

These homunculi were, in fact, the fruits of Lord Raziel's research.

And perhaps this generation would be Jerome's time to reign?

Meanwhile, Raziel's attention had returned to the bookstore. He had intended to use the mirror to peer into the bookstore's interior.

But at that moment, a sudden ominous sense of danger stopped him, and he froze in his tracks.

Raziel's eyes narrowed as he leaned back slightly.

It had been years... since he had experienced this acute sense of danger. It was as though just this one glance had plunged him into an abyss.

His curiosity was piqued all of a sudden.

What exactly was this bookstore hiding?

Raziel overcame his brief hesitation and raised his hand to his spectacle frame and began turning the knob slowly.

Chapter 247: The Non-Existent Bookstore

Chapter 247: The Non-existent Bookstore

Raziel stared intently at the bookstore in the mirror, making minute adjustments to the tiny knob on the spectacle frame with his fingers.

As opposed to earlier, his movements were much more cautious now.

The complexity of the intricate knob's mechanism was far beyond what any ordinary person could comprehend. Once activated, the needle of the precision scale would begin rotating, and time in the wearer's field of vision would start to flow and gradually rewind...

Settled dust dispersed as day, night, moon and sun, along with the various elements transitioned between the roof and the doorbell of the bookstore as time rewound slowly.

Raziel had chosen to rewind the image of the bookstore instead of the owner that had struck him with an utter sense of danger.

While he was very much interested in this mysterious figure that had strangely popped out as well as the fabled collection of books inside the bookstore, Raziel wasn't going to carry out such a foolish act.

Conducting a direct probe on someone with any unknown degree of mysticism was perilous, and any slight distraction could lead to severe consequences.

Even though he was a Supreme-rank, Raziel was well aware that he had to keep his ego in check and not fall into a moment of folly.

The more one knew, the more one would understand his own insignificance.

Curiosity was a much-needed quality of a scholar, yet the same could be said about the ability to suppress one's curiosity.

Raziel was able to use these spectacles named 'Witness-er' to rewind the history of a specified object or person, but he would never use it on someone of an equal rank.

Snooping on someone secretly, no matter the purpose, was an unforgivable act of great offense.

Once discovered, both parties would instantly become sworn enemies.

Therefore, Raziel decided to do it through rewinding the building of the bookstore itself, using 'Witness-er' on the thing closest to the bookstore owner to have an alternate view while avoiding any direct contact.

Perhaps, he might be able to discover some clues...

With the mindset, Raziel stared at the image of the gradually changing bookstore.

The original form of "Witness-er" was from identification and forensic magic of the scholars. He then combined the various methods of these and consolidated them into the current device.

By reverting the state of an object from its current developmental track and constantly repeating the process, one would arrive at a "past" image.

Therefore, it was more than just the object itself tracing back in time but it also provided relevant information of its specific state at that point in time.

The scale moved slowly.

Time rewound. An hour, a day, a month...

At first, there wasn't any distinct difference, just subtle ordinary changes to the bookstore from the light and shadows. Yet, it remained just like any other ordinary bookstore.

However, through the cracks of time, Raziel was still able to witness some of the past events.

We are Hosted Novel, find us on google.

From the traces on the worn-out door of the bookstore, Raziel could observe a failed assassination, a splatter of a dark elf's blood, and a one-sided slaughter.

“Gabriel’s aura... the false god from the Church of the Dome, how pathetic.”

Naturally, Raziel knew about his comrade’s demise, but to his surprise, the god-slaying beast that Gabriel had ‘abducted’ before was now someone else’s pet.

He then noticed the constantly changing ornaments in the bookstore, the traces left behind by different patrons—people from different factions—one after another, as though the entire power of the transcendent community in Norzin revolved around the bookstore.

Raziel squinted.

In a time where the ancient fellows of the Path of the Flaming Sword were all operating covertly, the bookstore was like a dazzling sun, attracting the light of fireflies and un-caging their potential.

“This bookstore owner must be plotting something huge... Besides controlling and subverting the influential factions of Norzin, looks like he’s got his eyes on the remaining races as well.

“What exactly is his motive?

“Given all these various signs, it does seem as if there are vague hints that he is intentionally going against the Path of the Flaming Sword. Could he be trying to prevent us from exploring the depths of the dream realm?” Raziel muttered to himself.

All of a sudden, his eyes lit up. “Regardless of his intentions, there’s no way I’ll hand over my masterpiece to anyone. Such a flawless creation... I would be one step closer to my goal if I can get my

hands on her.

“According to the book Michael found, God created Adam from the dust of the earth. I will imitate his creation of man to perform a miracle. In that case... I would be God!”

His gaze exuded a radiance of sheer determination. Yet in an instant, the confidence was replaced with an expression of fright and shock as his eyes widened in terror.

Through the golden-rimmed spectacles, the bookstore in his vision was now shrouded in a gloomy, night rain.

Howling wind and torrential rain vented their rage on everything within their reach. Yet, circles of ripples convene into droplets of water that flew upwards. In the bookstore, a dim light lit up the interior. Outside, the flooding gradually subsided.

A bolt of lightning flashed across the night sky, lighting up everything for a brief moment.

The shadow of a fuzzy, human-shaped silhouette appeared on the window above the bookstore’s wooden door.

It looked just like the shadow of a person.

But there was no one outside the door... nor behind it.

At this moment, the bookstore was completely empty. There was nothing, no books on the bookshelves, no bookstore owner behind the book counter.

All that was present was that strange, dark silhouette.

Through the rain, a faint, in-distinctive voice reached Raziel’s ear.

“Oh, it’s you, you’re here...”

Raziel stood up immediately with sheer strength that made the chair he was on disintegrate into dust.

His pupils contracted as a cold shiver started spreading from his

back; it felt as though he was standing in the rain. The surrounding air was cold and moist while droplets pounded his face with rage.

Raziel's breathing became rapid and heavy.

This voice... It's the bookstore owner's!

And that sentence, as though speaking with an acquaintance, was addressed to him.

"No! Impossible!"

Raziel shook his head and backed away in fear. He was unable to conceal his fright no matter how hard he tried to put on a calm and collected front.

This was supposedly an illusion to back-trace history. How could, how could he be conversing with me?

But... where is the bookstore owner?

Why did he suddenly disappear...

Raziel's face fell as if he lost control of his body while he continued to stare fixated at the silhouette on the window.

The bookstore owner's voice continued, "Are... you... looking... for me? Where are you?"

He's really speaking to me! Could he... be that silhouette?!

The horrifying truth took Raziel's breath away as his heart contracted, causing his vision to turn blurry for a split second.

"Where... are you?"

It was as though the bookstore owner was just right beside him, whispering into his ears. The proximity was down right creepy, and Raziel thought he could even feel his breath.

Raziel froze as he stared at the sight before him, trembling uncontrollably.

The silhouette had started moving. It raised an arm, across the non-existent space, and pointed right at him.

Chapter 248: Raziel Stopped Thinking

Chapter 248: Raziel Stopped Thinking

The non-existent rain stagnated in the non-existent continuum of space-time.

Backtracking droplets of rain fluttered upwards in the dark night sky, defying all logic, turning into crystal clear threads. An extremely twisted profile of the bookstore reflected in the stretched oval surface of these water threads.

It was as if the entire world wasn't real — in truth, that was accurate.

This was a historically-chronicled illusion fabricated by “Witnesser” using a large amount of reversion magic that only existed within the distance between Raziel's eyes and his spectacle lens.

No one else could see it besides him.

And it didn't even exist.

A simple analogy would be that these scenes were a series of objectively documented footage...

Everything that was going to happen within was already set in stone and absolutely nothing was going to be changed.

Yet, this evidently imaginary world had shattered the boundary between reality and imaginary at this very moment.

The dark, blurry figure didn't only know of Raziel's existence but had even pointed its finger at him. Clearly, it was aware of where Raziel was.

It was just like a character in a television series, suddenly turning toward the audience behind the screen before pointing and talking

to them.

This was simply a scene straight out of a ghastly horror film!

That would be how any ordinary person would feel. But to the Supreme-ranked Raziel with titles such as ‘Ethereal Wisdom’ and ‘Leader of Scholars,’ it was even more so.

Perhaps it was because of his mighty abilities and extensive knowledge that he could better comprehend the profoundness and mystery of this kind of terror.

At this moment, he was shuddering in fear. His scalp had gone numb and his entire body shook violently.

A thought was screaming in his mind without restraint, like a looping nightmare — *It’s seen me! It’s found me!*

Logically speaking, he was well aware that this was impossible.

Raziel, as a well-rounded scholar, had spent significant time studying space-time and other relevant subjects. Yet, no matter which discipline he approached the problem with, there was just no explanation for this.

It was simply beyond his comprehension.

Because this scene... didn’t even exist...

It was a mere illusion fabricated with aether and the use of machinery. It was all fake!

This isn’t real. It really doesn’t exist...

In fact, the “Witness-er” could only store and construct these images through Raziel’s mind. It was not even possible for it to be an arrival method commonly used by Supreme-ranks because the place did not even exist!

“How can something that does not exist even be changed? How does it even know that I’m here, looking for and observing it?” Raziel muttered to himself as he stared at this scene in confusion.

Being the Supreme-ranked scholar he was, Raziel had begun to contemplate about the bizarre occurrence as the countless possibilities flashed across his mind like a meteor shower in the night sky. Rationality allowed him to keep his cool as he pondered about the mystery.

All of a sudden, another thought surfaced abruptly like a tide crashing against a rock, breaking into a clear and simple answer.

Unless — he had tampered with Raziel's own consciousness...

Raziel had an epiphany.

So this is it!

Indeed, this is the only possibility.

Something that did not exist could not possibly be manipulated. The only viable explanation was that it had tampered with Raziel, himself.

Raziel was instantly enlightened.

“An impressive thought process and method. The owner of the bookstore... Lin Jie, wants to induce me with fear so that I'd admit defeat without putting up a fight?”

His trembling body gradually calmed down, and he had once again assumed his usual grave, confident yet relaxed expression as he slowly broke into a smile.

“Unfortunately, I have seen through your scheme and will not fall for such tricks... But to resort to such mind games, I'm afraid your abilities might not be as ‘unimaginable’ as described.

“You are merely just dangerous. In that case...”

Raziel stared at the scene before him which had started to change once more. As time rewound, the usual tranquility gradually resumed to the bookstore. Gone were the alterations, as though the dark, terrifying, and bizarre rainy night had all been a fleeting illusion.

Shortly after.

Shaking his head slowly, Raziel stopped fiddling with the knob on the spectacles as he gently tapped on the frame, deactivating “Witness-er.”

Search Hosted Novel for the original.

He had already rewound the time to two and a half years back. The scene before him had remained unchanged for quite some time.

Lin Jie arrived in Norzin three years ago and there was almost no visible change within that span of two years. Any further rewinding would probably not yield any tangible results.

The image in the mirror changed once again to display real time monitoring.

“Looks like my adorable gem, my masterpiece, my creation will return to my side shortly... S-277, or should I say Mu’en now?”

Raziel revealed a confident and determined smile as he observed the young girl occupied with work in the book cafe. He took a deep breath and adjusted his spectacles. “I can wait no longer, there isn’t any existence more perfect than this... My homunculus creation has developed a consciousness and emotions of its own, my path to divinity...”

His voice got softer, then he suddenly raised his hands, pressing fingers to his temples and chuckled.

“He-he-he-ha-ha-ha-ha... you think it was enough to scare me?!

“You merely tampered with my consciousness to create that illusion. You think I’d not realize it? I must say, your ploy of getting me to step in your trap unknowingly was indeed impressive. But you must be underestimating the intelligence of a Supreme-ranked scholar. Why would I waver because of this?

“Lin Jie... you must be feeling delighted now? But I must say that you are wrong...

“You can see me, but I can find you as well! You think you’ve hidden yourself well? No, I’ve found you!

“Hahahahaha... Where? Where are you?”

Raziel revealed a strange, mysterious smile as though he was staring right at the bookstore owner through the lens. In a screechy voice, he called out.

“Right—here!”

His fingers against his temple became razor sharp as they drilled inwards, breaking open skin, flesh, and bone, reaching for the brain... Till eventually, his palm covered his entire brain, holding on tightly.

Squelch!

Chapter 249: Don't Come Any Closer!

Chapter 249: Don't Come Any Closer!

Baam!

Jerome was startled by the sudden noise.

He was still basking in the fantasy of his desired future while still diligently carrying out his task of organizing all the relevant experimental data regarding S-277.

Although Jerome himself had a deeply buried ambition, he was still merely an assistant with a slightly higher level of intelligence than a cleaning robot at this point.

Once Lord Raziel dealt with the bookstore, Jerome felt that he could probably be promoted and replace Margaret as the Head of Medicine at the Truth Union.

At the thought of Margaret, Jerome couldn't help break into a gloating smirk.

That woman was a junior, yet her arrogance knew no bounds. Relying on her outrageous talent for arcanum medicine, she had even treated Jerome, her uncle, with contempt.

Simply put, Jerome hated Margaret with a vengeance.

When they had both been initially vying for the position of Head of Medicine, he had secretly reached out to offer Margaret a bribe, hoping that she would let him have the position.

Yet, Margaret had raised her chin and with a scornful look told Jerome that he did not deserve the position. While Jerome had put on a smile, he was livid inside and harbored hatred for her till now.

And after becoming his superior, she had decided to push forward a

reform, cutting off Jerome's side income from the sales of illicit medicine. This ruthlessness of Margaret's infuriated him even further.

Of course, this is all a thing of the past , thought Jerome to himself as he smiled with great pleasure while organizing the data.

The last time he had seen Margaret was in this exact secret underground laboratory.

By then, the arrogant woman with her usual look of disdain had already become research material for studying homunculus consciousness. Tubes had been stuck everywhere on her body and her head had been incised, exposing a huge portion of her brain.

Of course, she was still conscious and in fact very active, which was the prerequisite for the experiment.

However, she was immobile and incapable of sensing her surroundings.

Her soul had been fixed in place within her physical body as though imprisoned in a dark cell for eternity, a torture way beyond one's imagination.

Jerome would cackle uncontrollably with laughter when he thought of this place.

Lord Raziel's research required extensive mentally resilient scholars with a high level of brain development to serve as research material for homunculi. And naturally, these materials came from the Truth Union.

The greatest resource from the Truth Union were these very scholars...

And the one who placed Margaret on the list, needless to say, was Jerome.

Now, with Margaret's fate sealed and Jerome being the Deputy Head, ascending to assume the Head of Medicine position was only a matter of time for him.

After that... things were going to be much simpler.

Andrew, who was under the control of 'Spiritual Touch,' had been sent to the bookstore to become Jerome's scapegoat and was likely to meet his end at the bookstore owner's hands.

Find the original at Hosted Novel.

There would then be a vacancy for the position of Vice-Chairman.

The Chairman who had announced seclusion in a bid to attain Supreme-rank had in fact gone to the Lower District to investigate a mysterious relic. Having disappeared for half a year and speculation based on current intelligence reports, it was likely that she would never return.

Finally, he, Jerome, would be the Chairman of the Truth Union, the next Supreme-ranked...

His reverie for what was to come came to a sudden halt.

The noise from behind him almost made Jerome's soul leave his body. His heart dropped and his hands trembled, nearly causing him to delete the file by accident.

This was Lord Raziel's experiment laboratory, a place graced by the presence of a Supreme-rank. Why would there be such a huge commotion and significant aether fluctuations here...

Could Lord Raziel be conducting an experiment?

Jerome was reminded of the reflection of the bookstore on Raziel's mirror, and another possibility came to mind.

Or is Lord Raziel dueling with the bookstore owner across time and space, and this sound is the aftermath of their battle?

Overwhelmed with doubt and confusion, Jerome stood up fearfully and turned around to investigate.

What he saw was the un-moving Raziel.

However, the only difference from before was that Raziel was now in a retreating motion and the chair that he was sitting on previously had turned into a pile of dust on the ground.

What was stranger was that Raziel maintained this retreating stance while staring at the unchanged bookstore within the mirror.

“Lord Ra...Raziel?”

With trepidation, Jerome called out cautiously, “Lord Raziel, are you alright?”

There was no response.

Raziel continued staring at the mirror as though he hadn’t heard Jerome. It was at this moment that Jerome noticed that the great, wise old scholar was trembling...

Jerome thought that he was imagining things.

How can this be?!

His eyes widened as he did a double take. Raziel was indeed trembling.

Just like an ordinary person witnessing something utterly frightening, the great scholar was trembling violently as though he was going to make a run at any moment. Even his breathing was rapid and heavy.

Fear gripped Jerome. With only the two of them in the silent laboratory, things had become eerie, and a rising urge to escape was slowly building up in him.

What’s going on?!

What’s the matter with Lord Raziel?

What could possibly strike fear in a Supreme-ranked?

As these three questions reverberated in Jerome’s mind, Raziel suddenly moved.

He had hardly had time to rejoice when he realized that Raziel was ‘dancing around’ for nothing, making inexplicable little movements as if he were thinking about something.

And at the same time, Raziel went into a strange, bizarre, unintelligible rave.

It was as though he had lost his autonomy when making strange gestures while speaking in an unintelligible tongue. Soon, he began chuckling which got louder over time.

Stupefied by the scene before him, Jerome gulped and backed away slowly while stammering, “Lord, Lord Raziel, please wake up, don’t you scare me... Lord Raziel?”

“Raziel!

“Snap out of it!

“Please snap out of it!

Jerome was on the brink of losing his mind.

He was fine just moments ago, why did he become like this all of a sudden?!

Nothing happ... Wait a minute, Raziel was only doing that one thing, looking at the bookstore through the mirror!

Don’t tell me... No, no, no, how can that be...

Jerome shook his head in disbelief and denial. As he was backing away in shock, he witnessed a scene that he would never ever forget.

Sometime after breaking out in laughter, Raziel bizarrely pressed his fingers against his temple before digging in and reaching for his brain.

Jerome stood dumbfounded as he watched the Supreme-ranked scholar reach his hands into his head and squashed his own brain, unleashing a sonorous pop.

“Ho...Heheheh...”

An eerie smile hung on Raziel’s face as he withdrew his arms. On his hands were a mixture of red and white remnants of his brain, and there was a huge hole in his head.

Jerome’s expression couldn’t be described with words. His teeth were chattering and his heart nearly stopped beating as a looming sense of fear engulfed him.

The now brain-less Raziel let out a long sigh as if he had just done something really satisfying and comfortable. He turned over to Jerome as if nothing was amiss and patted his shoulder. “What’s the matter? Did I frighten you?”

“It’s alright, everything has been dealt with. It is all coming to an end. Don’t you worry, carry on with the organization of the data,” continued Raziel with a slight smile.

Jerome stiffly eyed the bloodied palm resting on his shoulder before shifting his gaze to Raziel’s head. The empty interior was visible through the hole and in there, an eye suddenly opened from within the remnants staring straight at him.

All of a sudden, Jerome started grabbing his hair with great force and let out a piercing scream.

“Arrghh—!!”

“Jerome?”

“Argh, ahhhhhah — Don’t come any closer!”

“Jerome, don’t be afraid, Can you continue with the organization of the data? I believe you can do it.”

“Arghhhhhhh—”

Krackk!

Jerome’s neck was snapped and his body tossed aside by Raziel.

“Blabbermouth.” Raziel frowned as he sat on Jerome’s original seat, patting his own head. “What a crazy fellow...”

He stretched his neck before operating the computer with a grin. “That bookstore owner had tampered with my consciousness indeed. I feel so much better now.”

“Ahh, what was I going to do... Oh right, perfect my creation. It appears that the materials for S-277 were not the most perfect. How could she possess any flaws, perhaps I should provide her with a higher quality philosopher’s stone as an actuating force...”

Chapter 250: Protect The Best — Boss Lin

Chapter 250: Protect The Best — Boss Lin

Prima lowered *Primordial Tome of Potions* and took a peep at Lin Jie who was still reading.

It had been a while since Andrew left.

Without any customers, the bookstore had returned back to its usual quiet and tranquility. The peacefulness of the place seemed as if it was isolated from the world.

The hustle and bustle of the outside world had nothing to do with this place.

The focused young man quietly turned over a page of the book in his hand. His head was slightly tilted downwards, and he gave off the vibe of a scholar. He was just like a very ordinary and harmless student studying in the ivory tower and not like someone who had served as a university lecturer.

Even more than that, he certainly did not seem like a mysterious and powerful bookshop owner in possession of a great deal of forbidden knowledge.

He was too young and a really good-natured man, who was adept at taking care of others...

These were thoughts Prima had more than once.

Even though she had only been here for a few days, she could still feel that the bookstore owner was an “amiable and approachable” man from up close.

Kind and warmhearted like a friend next door.

Which was why it always made people assume that the bookstore

owner was really “just an ordinary person.”

But when her gaze turned to the fat white cat by the young man’s hand and the rings on his fingers, such thoughts were instantly dispelled.

Besides... Even the Vice-Chairman of the Truth Union, a powerful figure often mentioned by my sister, came to visit Boss Lin in person to apologize.

Prima couldn’t help but shiver when she recalled all that she had seen.

Andrew seemed as though he was possessed by something invisible... There was surely something off about that book.

The compendium in her hands, for example, didn’t just contain descriptions of various herbs but also had some sealed-away material that were almost nonexistent.

Those medicinal herbs were ‘growing’ and ‘living’ within and even possessed their own consciousness within the book.

This novel is available on Hosted Novel.

Every book in the bookstore was extraordinary.

So, how could this bookstore owner be an ordinary man?

And that silver box, I’m sure about it. It’s the fabled treasure of Vice-Chairman Andrew’s family clan, the ‘Clock-wheel Worm.’ Since he actually gifted such an important family treasure to Boss Lin, it’s likely that he must have done something to offend Boss Lin in the past...

From another angle, for Vice-Chairman Andrew to apologize with such an important gift, it must mean that their entire family would suffer something worse than losing the Clock-wheel Worm if they weren’t forgiven.

...When I think about it this way, why does it seem like Boss Lin is the bad guy?

...Wait, no. It can't be...?

The young lady, whose head was still in the clouds, suddenly seemed to have come to an evident truth and her face froze.

If Boss Lin was the antagonist, those matters that were previously impossible to explain would all seem to make sense.

Prima peeked at Lin Jie cautiously, only a faint voice inside her heart was still wanting to convince herself that Lin Jie was a good man, just that his means were more... peculiar.

The cat might be just ugly, Andrew's abnormality could be just a misconception, and it's normal for the books that were transcendent objects to be a little strange...

Noticing Prima's gaze, Lin Jie looked up and asked, "Student Prima, what's wrong?"

He closed up the book he was reading with care. His movements were always gentle when handling books because it was the basic respect to knowledge.

But if it was a book for commercial sale, Lin Jie might perhaps be a little rougher with it.

Prima shook her head and waved her hands frantically. "Nothing, nothing," she said. "I just miss my sister..."

"I see."

Lin Jie placed the book aside and nodded. He then said helplessly, "I just asked Andrew for help. Having Jerome confess to his crime right away might be impossible. I do understand your worry. After all, your sister's current situation may be very dangerous, and she might have already encountered it.

"But you must also understand that being anxious now is of no use. Rather, it would disturb your state of mind and hinder the recovery of your wounds. What you need to do is to remain calm and wait patiently so that you can greet your hated enemies at your strongest, and then strike them hard.

“Do you understand?”

Prima nodded her head repeatedly like a chick pecking at rice as she listened to Lin Jie’s guidance.

Lin Jie gave her a warm, reliable, and gentle smile upon seeing this. “I asked Andrew to call me as soon as he receives any news. Rest assured that you will be informed as soon as there’s news. All you have to do is take care of yourself.”

Prima felt warm and fuzzy inside upon hearing this. “Thank you.”

Boss Lin’s methods are a little strange, but he’s certainly not a scary person. He has a close relationship with Lady Walpurgis after all, so he’s definitely kind!

Prima clenched her little fists and was firm about her belief.

“You’re welcome. Helping to make the world a kinder place is a tiny personal wish of mine,” replied Lin Jie with a smile.

The usually weak and timid Prima even felt an impulse to protect Lin Jie.

Even though she knew how powerful he was, she suddenly had this extreme desire to protect that smile of his!

Boss Lin is so kind, he surely has a sincere heart. But this world is always so cruel...

She wanted to become stronger like Boss Lin and accomplish this tiny wish!

Prima made up her mind.

As she was immersed in her own idealistic thoughts, Boss Lin’s communications device suddenly rang.

Lin Jie fished it out and saw that Andrew’s name was being displayed. He raised an eyebrow and muttered, “Speak of the devil, seems like there has been progress.”

Prima sprang to the counter, eager to know how her sister was.

Boss Lin wanted to have Andrew bring Jerome over. I wonder if things went smoothly. Would something have happened? How is my sister?

Lin Jie shook his head when he saw the desperate look on Prima's face and handed the communications device to her. "You can ask him yourself."

Prima took the communications device nervously, breathing deeply before pressing it to her ear and answering the call.

Through the communicator, Andrew's voice was trembling. "Mr. Lin... Jerome's dead! He died in his office for no apparent reason. His neck was snapped and his brain, organs, bones, and flesh were hollowed out... All that was left was his skin, and he looked as if he had seen something terrible, full of fear and hysteria.

"Only a near-perfect quality philosopher's stone was left by his side."

His voice got shakier and he took several deep breaths before continuing, "I still remember your instructions... I-I will bring 'him' to you."

Lin Jie's words echoed in Prima's ears. *"Having Jerome confess to his crime right away might be impossible—"*

The young lady was stunned.

Indeed, it was impossible for Jerome to confess his crime immediately.

But, he could die right away.

Chapter 251: How Heinous

Chapter 251: How Heinous

Prima was at a loss.

Dead... Jerome, the man behind the disappearance of Prima's sister Margaret and the one who had sent the dark elf stalker after her, was dead just like that?

For a moment, everything felt surreal to her, but she felt even more bewildered by the 'lofty ambition' she felt which hadn't yet dissipated.

Wanting to protect the sincere Boss Lin and that gentle smile of his... To make the world a kinder place?

And amid Boss Lin's gentle smile, Jerome had died a silent and tragic death in his own office, hollowed out until only a bag of skin remained.

Judging from the trembling in Andrew's voice, the scene of Jerome's death was so gruesome that even the Vice-Chairman of the Truth Union was shaken to his core.

Dead men, of course, couldn't confess.

From a certain point of view, there really wasn't any error in what Lin Jie had said.

Others might not know who was responsible for this "Truth Union Secret Room Murder Case," but the two people, who recently witnessed Boss Lin's anger toward Jerome for destroying his bookstore's door, were clear about the truth.

Prima felt that the idea she had earlier on was really foolish and naive.

Really foolish, really...

She knew that Boss Lin's smile was so gentle, yet she had forgotten that he had that same gentle smile when he had pointed to the patched-up hole on the door, asking Andrew to bring Jerome over to discuss compensation.

Search Hosted Novel for the original.

And now, it was difficult to tell... Was the world crueler, or was Boss Lin the one who was crueler...

For a moment, Prima felt conflicted.

The young maiden's heart of hers that had the desire to protect something felt vaguely disillusioned.

It was just like the princess saving the prince only to find out that the one she saved was actually a hypocritical, villainous dragon.

Still, the thought of Boss Lin coming down so harshly on Jerome because of harm to her and Margaret — although that door was probably the main reason — suddenly didn't seem that unacceptable after all.

Also... It made her feel really happy.

E-Even if he's the villain, he's an extremely kind one! Mm, that's right!

Prima thought it through, and her gaze became even more determined.

Lady Walpurgis, who controlled the night, couldn't have been wrong. And Boss Lin, the bearer of the Contractual Ring, had already responded to her prayers by slaying Jerome.

Now, it was her time to return the favor.

Boss Lin must have wanted to train her when he gave her the **Primordial Tome of Potions** — she was too weak as of now, incapable of even defeating a Pandemonium-rank stalker. It was simply impossible for her to repay an entity of Boss Lin's caliber.

She needed to properly absorb the medicinal knowledge from the

book as soon as possible so that she could be of use to Boss Lin and repay him this way.

The young girl standing stiffly in place regained her composure as her line of thought changed slightly once more.

Probably... pledging her allegiance to the evil dragon?

The voice over the communications device continued, "Jerome is dead... But Margaret's whereabouts are still unknown, and we are still in the process of identifying the spell traces. However, there aren't any results yet and the killer... uhm, has unimaginable power, ruling out the possibility of suicide.

"It's most likely done by a Supreme-ranked being."

Andrew had slightly hesitated when he said the word 'killer,' and Prima took the hint.

Evidently, he already had a guess in mind that was probably true and thus didn't know how to phrase it.

Andrew went on, "Those hidden elixirs belonging to Jerome have been found, and there was a high-level mind-influencing drug indeed with a dispersal trajectory covering nearly the entire Truth Union."

He then lowered his voice. "It's truly frightening now that I think about it... Without as much as a squeak, he almost took control of the entirety of the Truth Union, and everyone was none the wiser carrying out tasks for some unknown person.

"I really cannot imagine what would have become of the Truth Union if it wasn't for you."

Andrew then paused before going on, "Besides that, some unauthorized transcendental items from the Ash Chamber of Commerce were recovered, which according to previous intelligence reports were probably obtained from the Path of the Flaming Sword member, Congreve of the Chapman family, who was killed by Wilde some time back.

“In short... The mole has been identified.

“My popularity, my approval rating has seen an upturn. Various authorial suspensions have been lifted, and my prestige will probably have completely surpassed Diamante’s by the time the next meeting is held...”

Andrew then lowered his voice further, and a tiny hint of elation could be heard within. “The Truth Union will only be the true Truth Union under your will and leadership.”

At this point, Prima couldn’t help but lift her head up and look at Lin Jie who noticed her gaze.

Lin Jie found that the meaning of that gaze was somewhat strange. It was as if this young lady was trying to find out some deep meaning from looking at his face. Thus, he raised an eyebrow and asked skeptically, “What’s wrong? Is it bad?”

With a frown, he uttered with some worry, “As a Vice-Chairman, Andrew alone should be able to deal with this Deputy Head...”

Here we go again...

Prima couldn’t help pouting. Mr. Lin always had this innocent look, giving others the impression that he really didn’t know anything.

How heinous!

Although Prima wasn’t exactly clear what had happened previously, Vice-Chairman Andrew had apparently been instructed by Boss Lin to carry out his will and brand the Truth Union under the bookstore.

This behemoth of an organization that administered the movement of nearly all transcendent beings in Norzin now appeared on the verge of falling into Boss Lin’s control.

Jerome couldn’t be any more dead, and the one who had been responsible was over here pretending to be worried whether Andrew could deal with a corpse...

Who would believe that?

Prima, who had been ‘deceived’ earlier on, grimaced slightly and concluded that she would never believe Mr. Lin’s ‘kind and gentleness’ ever again.

That said, it seems that Boss Lin had long planned to make use of this incident to not only kill Jerome but also get Vice President Andrew to seize the opportunity to break out from his predicament...

Prima shook her head, sorted out her state of mind, and summarized, “Everything is fine. Things are going really well. Vice-Chairman Andrew said that Jerome is dead, and it turned out that he was the mole from the Path of the Flaming Sword. He is grateful that you helped him turn the tide.

“Also, there was a... uhm... A philosopher’s stone was left at the scene. He will bring it to you later on.”

Philosopher’s stone?

Lin Jie frowned, realizing that this matter was more complicated than he imagined.

Chapter 252: Joint Forces Success

Chapter 252: Joint Forces Success

Of course, Lin Jie knew what a philosopher's stone was.

As a folklorist who also researched the occult and mystical, such an object of great symbolism representing the ultimate pursuit in alchemy was definitely no stranger to him.

The obsession over the philosopher's stone by alchemists of the western hemisphere was similar to how Chinese taoists would have a fixation over the Pills of Immortality and various other longevity elixirs.

Humans had always hoped to create a material capable of granting any wish, but in reality, besides this stone, they ended up creating all sorts of absurd doohickey. In a certain sense, this could also count as granting all their wishes...

And in Azir, the concept of alchemists, philosopher's stone etc. were all somewhat all pages of the same book, though none have managed to succeed.

Something noteworthy was how the philosopher's stone was also claimed as the fifth element... which was aether. Lin Jie often would often wonder whether the two might just be two different sides of the same coin.

With his thoughts having led to this point, Boss Lin's creased eyebrows loosened up as he contemplated further. He had a few conjectures regarding Jerome being the mole planted inside the Truth Union by the Path of the Flaming Sword.

The Path of the Flaming Sword was more complicated than he thought.

It was a secret, ambitious organization created to seek the power left behind from a mythological age with the power to back it up.

Lin Jie's previous experience of giving Young Mike a beat-down had allowed him to gauge that this organization might already have some grasp of transcendental power, albeit lacking in strength.

After all, how could Lin Jie be able to beat actual transcendental beings with the shoddy basics he had picked up from a mere few months of training under Silver?

However, it was without a doubt that their strength was overwhelming with regard to an ordinary human.

Hence, assuming the Path of the Flaming Sword's remaining 'angels' were around Michael's level—though Lin Jie found it ridiculous how these chuunibyou viewed themselves as holy—the existence of this organization was more than capable of endangering the whole Norzin, like a ticking time bomb. (Even though Lin Jie hadn't properly managed to gauge their strength since Gabriel had died too quickly while Young Mike fled)

Not to mention that this organization even employed advanced espionage strategies and planted moles in every other organization.

There wasn't much needed to be said about the Church of the Dome. This corrupt power had been completely under the control of the Path of the Flaming Sword.

Cherry had recently discovered her brother Congreve's supply of contrabands to the Path of the Flaming Sword, and the resolution of that matter was still yet unclear.

Now, even a scholastic organization like the Truth Union had also been exposed...

It wasn't that hard to imagine that the Norzin Police that Joseph and Claude represented might be teeming with moles from the Path of the Flaming Sword too.

With the allies being sitting ducks in the light and enemies hidden in the shadows, the situation didn't seem especially optimistic.

Fortunately, the mole within the Truth Union had now been removed, just that he probably wasn't the only one...

But in any case, Andrew is really merciless, huh, to just get rid of the guy like this, thought Lin Jie.

Jerome seemed like a rather ruthless person since he could make a direct order to assassinate a young lady like Prima. Therefore, in a situation of fierce resistance, ending the life of such a dangerous perpetrator isn't out of the question.

But back to the main issue; researching the philosopher's stone isn't something unexpected for an organization such as the Path of the Flaming Sword, whose main objective was to pursue transcendent powers.

From information he had gotten from the book he borrowed and other research notes, even the Truth Union was also researching philosopher's stones.

I'm afraid that this philosopher's stone doesn't actually transmute metal to gold, nor does it provide immortality. Rather, it is simply a physical condensation of aether refined via certain methods. Lin Jie rubbed his chin and mused.

The construction of his dream realm was accomplished with his control over aether. Theoretically, if he were to master and utilize his method of making the dream realm descend into reality, then altering reality according to his will wouldn't exactly be an impossible feat.

Thus, this conveniently matched the characteristics of the philosopher's stone.

The Path of the Flaming Sword are probably the only ones who have the power to actually create philosopher's stones. Hence the stone left at the crime scene brings about another possibility—The Path of the Flaming Sword had acted preemptively and silenced the mole to prevent information being leaked.

With this line of thought, Lin Jie raised his head and questioned,

“How did Jerome die?”

How did he die...

Shouldn't you pose this question to yourself?!

Though this was what popped up in her mind, Prima still answered truthfully, “He was killed by someone. He was lying dead in his own office by the time the Truth Union found him.”

That should be right then. Lin Jie nodded his head.

Find the original at Hosted Novel.

He just knew that it was unlike Andrew to straight out get a person killed. It turned out that the Path of the Flaming Sword had got to Jerome first.

Looks like the Path of the Flaming Sword is especially vigilant... Things really aren't that simple.

Lin Jie had just requested Andrew to bring Jerome over and the latter was dead in the next moment. The lead he had was practically cut off.

Haa... Someone like Young Mike who wields transcendent powers isn't to be underestimated!

Lin Jie then asked, “What about your sister?”

Prima hung her head in slight dismay. “My sister’s whereabouts are still unknown...”

Lin Jie consoled her for a bit, then proceeded to inform Andrew that there were definitely other moles besides Jerome in the Truth Union.

Surely whoever murdered Jerome must have also been someone from the Truth Union.

Besides that, Lin Jie asked for the philosopher’s stone to be delivered here at once. He, too, wanted to learn more about it.

On the other end of the call.

Andrew listened to the soft-spoken female voice and answered respectfully.

After hanging up, he observed the bustling office.

Jerome's corpse... No, just a bag of skin. The only reason why his remains were only being moved out now was because the room had to remain uncontaminated for the purpose of checking for aetheric traces.

All unrelated personnel, Vice-Chairman Andrew included, were gathered nearby the crime scene to sate their curiosity.

The one currently in charge of this situation was Diamante.

Currently, Andrew was hiding in a corner reporting the situation to the bookstore owner. "I will send you the philosopher's stone as soon as possible.

"Do you have any other instructions?

"Oh, alright... Margeret's whereabouts are still being investigated.

"I'm afraid we will have to dig even deeper since there are still moles around. I have a few suspects in mind, but I will need even more authority to further my investigation."

Andrew could faintly catch the voice of Boss Lin on the other end of the call, immediately followed by Prima saying, "Be careful."

He instantly understood that this one-sided conversation was almost concluded.

He now knew that it was only Prima on the phone now.

"Prima... Your name is Prima, am I right? Once you've recovered, would you perhaps be interested in temporarily filling out for your sister?" Andrew asked abruptly.

Prima hesitated, to which Andrew gave a further elaboration, “It isn’t my place to tell you this, but it’s highly likely that your sister is in a bad spot now. Even if she does make it back alive, she probably wouldn’t be able to continue holding on to her position.

“Now that Jerome has died, there are vacant positions at the top of the Medicine Department. Don’t you wish to help out Boss Lin much more?”

There was a burning look in Andrew’s eyes as he said it.

Among the crowd of scholars nearby engaged in fervent discussion stood Hood, the nephew of President Maria. He appeared to be staring at Andrew while deep in thought.

At this point, Andrew looked up and met his gaze.

As their eyes met, a sudden spark of connection sent trembles down their spines.

Chapter 253: The Lords Inaction Is Wisdom

Chapter 253: The Lord's Inaction Is Wisdom

It has been almost a month since Hood had been to the bookstore and gifted Lin Jie *Dark Ages, Rise & Fall of Alfords* which he had gotten from the Truth Union's depository.

However, that bizarre night still remained fresh in his mind.

That had been a night that changed his life. From seeing the gleam of his blade up till the point where he got a direct insight into that man's soul.

What Hood felt during that experience was difficult to describe. It was as if the misty veil shrouding the entire world had, at that moment, been suddenly lifted.

All was revealed; everything of the past had become crude and false. And from then on, the truth was only what lay before him.

As such, with his eyes wide open, he looked up and gazed at that man.

A clear notion was imprinted into his mind.

—This was an existence he had to follow and place his faith in. This was his God and Lord.

Ever since he had directly observed the bookstore owner's soul, Hood was certain that his own soul had been tainted and completely transfigured into something he couldn't decipher himself.

At the same time, the anomaly to his soul had rapidly spread to his flesh and body concurrently, causing a third eye to grow on his glabella... From a certain angle, Hood now felt he had turned into a

monster and could no longer consider himself a human.

However, this did not stop him from believing it was a gift from the divine. It was simply the price he had to pay for great power.

He called this third eye the ‘All-knowing Eye,’ to represent the favor bestowed on him by this great god.

With this eye, Hood was able to instantly gain insight to the thoughts of others and could even control another’s mind with just eye contact alone.

Hood knew what he had to do. His Lord had granted him this power so that he could further spread ‘His’ name, allowing more to believe in ‘His’ wisdom!

As such, Hood could not fail his Lord’s expectations, and at the same time, it was his own belief as well!

Believing the Truth is an aberration, only having faith in Wisdom is absolute!

As a member of the Truth Union and President Maria’s nephew, Hood needed to correct this colossal mistake!

The scholars of the Truth Union had all been walking on a misguided path. And now, the Lord shall save them from their quagmire!

What greatness!

Therefore, even though Boss Lin hadn’t provided any further instructions, Hood’s ‘Wisdom-Seekers’—the group of young ‘Truth-Seekers’ had since renamed themselves after the trip to the bookstore—had been expanding.

Of course, in Hood’s opinion, the Lord’s inaction was also wisdom.

This was clearly a test of his ability and awareness.

If he needed to be hand-held all the time, the Lord could just do it himself, and would there even be any use for Hood?

The Lord's objective must surely be to train him with practical experience, allowing him to gradually grasp and master his newly obtained soul, body, and powers.

And once he had become much stronger, he would then be chosen to become the Lord's right-hand man.

The Lord needs no dead-weight!

Hood didn't dare to slack off, largely because an organization named 'Corpse Devouring Sect' had recently emerged and were becoming prominent among criminal organizations in Norzin—Most transcendental criminal organizations in Norzin were on the bounty list of the Truth Union.

It was unclear how many members the 'Corpse Devouring Sect' currently had, but it was known that there were four rather lively mask-wearing superiors who had participated in Blood Feast in the past.

There was also a leader who rarely made appearances and also doubled up as the priest of 'Corpse Devouring Sect.'

He was usually spotted in a suit, wearing a black iron mask, and having a large 'dog.'

According to various information reports, the leader of this group was indeed the Destructive-rank black magician, 'Faceless Black Scale' Wilde!

Their methods of choosing inductees was uniquely simple and cruel—forcing ones they chose to read their holy scripture: ***Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies.***

And there were only two outcomes in store for those that saw this scripture.

The first was that the reader would instantly suffer from psychosis and die, usually from an imploded cranium. Sometimes, incessant malignant mutation would accompany this.

In the second scenario, readers would find themselves drowned in

an overwhelming amount of forbidden knowledge and, as such, obtain great power. Concurrently, their personalities would also seem to change completely as they became utterly devoted fanatics of the ‘Corpse Devouring Sect.’

Search Hosted Novel for the original.

With such an effective selection process, the ‘Corpse Devouring Sect’ could be simply considered the worst of the worst.

Reading it meant insanity and death, or becoming a loyal follower.

The strength of it was truly unbelievable.

Yet, precisely because of this selection process, the scale of operation for the ‘Corpse Devouring Sect’ was still relatively small and didn’t attract a whole lot of attention. This led many to doubt their existence.

Of course, there were also crazed fellows who would willingly seek them out to be ‘selected,’ hoping to prove the tenacity of their spiritual will.

Most of these people harbored hopes they could get in via a fluke and then free ride on the Corpse Devouring Sect’s strength.

The results, though, were self-evident...

Some said that Wilde was a ghost returning from hell and it was all an act of revenge against Joseph and Secret Rite Tower for his downfall two years ago, while ‘Corpse Devouring Sect’ was all just a facade.

However, the true reason couldn’t be any less coherent to Hood.

Wilde was just helping his Lord spread ‘His’ faith.

Because this mighty black magician was a patron of the bookstore!

Corpse Devouring Sect had only started to spread extensively after Wilde had brought his four unknown entourage to visit Boss Lin!

Hood was certain that Wilde was also working for the bookstore owner—Corpse Devouring Sect was Lin Jie's will!

This also meant that Wilde's alleged 'Corpse Devouring Sect' and Hood's 'Wisdom-Seekers' had similar origins!

Hence, Hood was now further assured—his Lord definitely had been observing him the entire time.

Even though it had never been mentioned explicitly, the Lord had set up a rival for him without his knowledge.

He definitely would've felt embarrassed now if he had slacked off previously.

The both of them were the bookstore owner's lackeys, and both had set up a group around the same time. The incompetent party would become the laughingstock among the two.

This is the Lord's inaction, truly great wisdom without saying a thing! Competition is the greatest motivator!

Hood was thoroughly impressed by the bookstore owner's wisdom.

At the same time, he also felt nervous and worried.

This really is nerve-wrecking... Wilde has Destructive-rank ability after all. He also has quite the reputation and can easily gather people. Even if the Corpse Devouring Sect only just started to move, they'll soon be swarming with believers giving that crushing might.

Me on the other hand? As the nephew of the President of the Truth Union, people wouldn't voluntarily respect me even if they don't dare to offend me. My 'Wisdom-Seekers' has only been formed recently, and I haven't even publicized it yet...

The Truth Union's structure is too complex and I don't have that much power...

Upon hearing about Jerome's inexplicable sudden death, the troubled Hood decided to head to the scene to look around.

En route there, amongst all the hurrying scholars, he couldn't help thinking, *If I want to truly convert the Truth Union into the base of operations for the 'Wisdom-Seekers,' I will require someone comparable to Wilde. Someone with the same appeal, power, and leadership.*

Just then, through the crowd of people, he made eye contact with Andrew, who appeared to be on a call.

Chapter 254: Arrangement

Hood stopped in his tracks as though an electric current had zipped through him, sending a shuddering tingling throughout his body.

A thought popped up in Hood's mind the instant their eyes met.

That's him!

Despite being separated by a crowd and standing in a corner, Vice-Chairman Andrew remained especially conspicuous.

Even though he had aged considerably, Andrew who was a lady's man in his younger days still looked quite good. Standing among the Truth Union scholars who were typically unmindful of their appearances meant he stood out like a sore thumb.

Secondly, that was something uncannily telepathic that had made Hood meet his eyes right away.

Andrew's profound blue eyes emanated an indistinct, faint radiance when their gaze met, exuding great wisdom. This glow was the sort that would induce an unexplained sense of awe and fear in others.

An ordinary person meeting Andrew's gaze would probably be paralyzed by fear, faint, or even hallucinate. One with a weaker will might even lose their mind.

Though he amounted to nothing much in the presence of a higher being like Boss Lin, this was the influence of a peak Pandemonium-rank transcendent being's level of mysticism.

He could 'kill' someone just by merely standing there.

Yet, Hood could feel his third eye emitting a burning heat as though it was calling out to Andrew.

This innate feeling was as if it was exclaiming that Andrew was friendly and there wasn't any need for suspicion.

The other party was likewise also a believer of the Lord!

The feeling of ‘meeting a fellow countryman abroad’ made Andrew both elated and excited.

Previously, while Hood knew Andrew, he didn’t have a favorable impression of this Vice-Chairman.

Firstly, Andrew wasn’t a Truth-Seeker and, in fact, greatly despised them; having condemned them for their extremity in his many public speeches.

Of course, this was the stance for the majority of the Truth Union. Even Hood’s aunt, Chairman Maria, didn’t support the Truth-Seekers.

Hood’s original intention for joining the Truth-Seekers wasn’t because he agreed with the ideology but instead stemmed from his teenage rebellious phase... which resulted in him wanting to try something different and unique.

But after joining for some time, he had gradually integrated himself into their culture of extremity.

Secondly, Andrew, an aristocratic man conscious of his demeanor, was always debonair and elegant.

To an extreme and hot-blooded teenager like Hood, Andrew was the epitome of ‘greasy’ and naturally was a turn off.

Yet, right now, he had only a single thought—

A comrade!

Furthermore, Hood had just been thinking that he needed someone powerful and influential to support the growth of his ‘Wisdom-Seekers.’

And the perfect candidate appeared before him at the very next moment was coincidentally also a fellow follower of the bookstore.

This definitely wasn’t a coincidence. Surely it was the bookstore

owner's arrangement and the will of the mighty Lord!

Andrew, who was on the opposite end, felt pretty much the same way.

He had never expected Hood had already become a follower of the bookstore earlier on!

The old Andrew had always viewed the bookstore with animosity. Revealing information and coercing the Truth-Seekers to 'steal' knowledge from the bookstore led to Andrew meeting the greatest water-loo of his life.

Having his authority stripped and put under surveillance meant that Andrew's whole world turned upside down and it was as good as being placed under house arrest. Throughout this trial period, Andrew had endured it all while looking for an opportunity to strike back. He also came to understand the power of the bookstore during this time and sought to redeem himself.

But when he ordered the Truth-Seekers to cease all operations, the order was intercepted by Jerome and it hadn't been passed down.

Andrew was extremely depressed and in dire straits himself during that period. After learning that those Truth-Seekers led by Hood had returned unscathed, he no longer bothered about it.

It was rumored that this bunch of kids had become a little strange, frequently babbling among themselves, while some internal conflicts arose within the Truth-Seekers.

Andrew initially reckoned that they had been taught a lesson by the bookstore owner, but to his surprise, he now realized they had been converted to followers of the bookstore!

Through the crowd, the two faithful followers of the bookstore seemingly found a sense of camaraderie.

But now isn't the time... thought Andrew.

He had only just gotten the chance to make his comeback after identifying the mole and having his grievances addressed. He had

managed to somewhat strike back by ridiculing Diamante and seizing the incident's investigation authority back in domineering fashion.

However, he would still require time to regain his prestige.

At this time, if the two of them who had no prior interactions appeared close, it would lead to the suspicion of others. Diamante especially, who would capitalize on such an opportunity to pull some tricks if he noticed.

They couldn't do it in public at the very least.

In the split moment their gazes met, both Andrew and Hood seemed to have understood each other's intention.

Hood pressed a finger to his forehead and the third eye blinked. With a smirk, he gradually retreated and disappeared into the crowd.

Seeing this, Andrew turned and spoke a few words to others, instructing them to disperse the onlookers. Next, he ordered someone to guard the entrance as he entered the room and shut the door.

Creak... Bam.

Andrew surveyed the entire room and didn't find anything strange. An ordinary table, chair and shelves, the standard Truth Union-styled leather sofa, a smooth marbled floor, and a white carpet.

There weren't any traces of blood present on the ground or carpet. On the side was a chalk outline of a body which was where Jerome had been initially found.

A crystal clear philosopher's stone was placed on the table, perfectly intact.

Judging from the scene, it seemed that Jerome's neck had been snapped instantaneously by someone before having his life force siphoned dry and converted into a philosopher's stone.

That's right. The raw material of this philosopher's stone was Jerome.

This was a terrifying but undoubted fact.

It seemed like the perpetrator wasn't even concerned about Jerome from the looks of the bag of skin and the philosopher's stone; all of it appeared to be an act of convenience, and this office hadn't been the first crime scene either. Perhaps, he had been lacking material for his experiment and decided to turn Jerome into his raw material for refining.

When Andrew recalled how the bookstore owner instructed him to "bring Jerome over to discuss compensation of the door," he suddenly came to an understanding.

What this meant was to have Jerome himself be the compensation!

Therefore, this was the reason Andrew had called the bookstore right away and mentioned bringing the philosopher's stone over.

This was all the bookstore owner's will!

Now that Andrew was seeking to regain his foothold, he needed to recruit a new band of trusted aides as his previous team had already been dissolved.

And now, Hood was bringing those Truth-Seekers right to him.

Boss Lin had everything arranged to perfection!

"Heh."

Hood's voice came from behind Andrew. He turned around and saw the teenager remove the grating and leaped out from the vent in Jerome's office with a radiant smile plastered on his face.

"Vice-Chairman Andrew, I think we can speak now."

Andrew extended his arm with a smile as he looked at the third eye on Hood's forehead. "Yes, we should talk about how we are going to gift the Truth Union to our almighty Lord..."

Chapter 255: Ji And A16 Manor

Chapter 255: ‘Ji’ And A16 Manor

While Hood and Andrew were in Jerome’s office discussing, something else important was also happening elsewhere in A16 Manor, which was also in the Central District.

A16 Manor had the family name Ji.

Find the original at Hosted Novel.

It was a family name from the Northern Lands. While there were many that spoke the language in Norzin, there weren’t many Northland-ers living in the city.

“Ji” was the most dazzling name amongst Northern family names, and it could even be said that this family clan was the most dazzling one among the aristocrats in Norzin.

Hunters originated from the Northern Lands.

With the emergence of the first hunter, ordinary humans possessing no magic, knowledge, or extraordinary gifts such as super strength gained the capabilities to fight against dream beasts.

As such, the Northland-ers undoubtedly had an important standing in the history of both humankind and transcendent beings. Their past glories could still be identified by their language being one of the most widely used.

But similarly, the Northland-ers having a much too high regard for hunters resulted in the abuse of sordid blood, which consequently created the terrible disaster of beast mutation.

The power of the sordid blood accumulated within the Northland-ers unleashed itself all at once, manifesting into a disease and turning most who had used sordid blood—regardless of dosage—into beasts at that time.

The disaster wiped out a considerable population of the Northlanders in a flash as the various original formulas of the hunters disseminated widely. Their glory faded into normalcy, eventually resulting in only a small population of Northlanders left within Norzin.

Yet, the affection of the Northlanders toward hunters still remained even today.

This was also the reason Ji Zhixiu decided to become a hunter instead of another transcendent class.

Of course, the current her wasn't 'Nightmare Weaver' Ji Zhixiu, the female leader of 'Spider,' the hunter organization that had tacitly replaced 'White Wolf.'

Instead, it was Ji Zhixiu, the noble heiress of the Ji family and the only daughter of the president of Rolle Resource Development.

Ji Zhixiu was wearing a black, loose off-shoulder gauze dress with an alluring red rose attached to her bosom, revealing her exquisite collarbone and fair neck. She lifted the hems of her dress while walking briskly across the corridor in a pair of heels.

Her gorgeous face sparkled under the light; her steel gaze was razor sharp and her slender figure further highlighted the length of her legs. She looked absolutely majestic.

Servants along the corridor all made way for her while bowing in respect.

After passing by countless rooms and taking numerous turns, she finally arrived before a thick, palatial door.

When the massive door opened, what came into sight was the dancing of the white curtain in the balcony from a distance which provided a bird's eye view of the entire scenery. The nearby private fenced garden, colossal fountain pool, rows of perfectly symmetric pathways, small hill from afar, lush maple forest, azure blue miniature lake... Bright lights in the night sky were like stars in a summer night, embellishing the tranquil and breathtaking

environment.

As Norzin was a man-made city, there weren't any natural attractions within the inner city.

Therefore, this vast area of 'hills, forests, and lakes' within the city center was, in fact, all synthetic.

Which also meant that the 'natural-looking' scenery outside was actually part of A16 Manor.

Or, in a certain sense, it actually couldn't be called a 'manor' but a 'district' instead.

A16 Manor spanned across tens of thousand square kilometers, the luxurious four-storied manor—or rather, castle—occupied a tenth of the area, with the remaining being occupied by artificial natural attractions.

Logically, given Norzin's congested architecture layout, it was almost impossible to devote such a large area of land for aesthetic pleasure. Not to mention the prime location of Central District, where every inch of land was as exorbitant as gold.

But the Jis were really too damn rich.

In fact, Ji Bonong had purchased the mansions from A16 to A20 and combined them into a new residential district named "A16 Manor."

Or rather, as some Central District aristocrats would call it, "Norzin's Lone Island."

Although unprecedented, there were no regulations prohibiting it. The authorities of the Central District had promptly agreed after some discussion.

While Azir had lost its ocean and islands after being enveloped by the Wall of Fog, through the historical records, it wasn't difficult to imagine an island standing alone like a maverick, braving against the ferocious waves of the vast ocean.

In Norzin's waves of metallic steel, "A16 Manor" was that lone island standing tall.

It was a green haven for the extravagant aristocrats.

Every few months, Ji Bonong would hold a grand party here and send out invitations voraciously, to aristocrats, businessmen, and even the transcendent beings among them.

These people were all proud of being invited. Even though they might not necessarily get to meet the head of the conglomerate, it was at least something worth bragging about for years.

And with that, Ji Bonong had made acquaintances with his fair share of high-ranking transcendent beings.

Transcendent beings, apart from Supreme-ranks, were human too and could be easily swayed with monetary gains. Especially from someone as influential as the chief decision-maker of Rolle Resources.

Yet, in recent times, these parties had ceased for quite a while.

Ji Zhixiu shut the door as she looked toward the spacious study table by the window where a middle-aged man was sorting through all sorts of documents.

Ji Bonong put down his pen and looked up, revealing his slightly weary face. Rubbing his temples, he asked, "What's the matter? How can I help you? Is the Hunter organization lacking funds?"

Ji Zhixiu fiddled with the rose on her bosom, and at that moment, its petals unfolded, revealing a seemingly fathomless abyss within. Ji Zhixiu reached in and retrieved a document which she then placed on Ji Bonong's desk.

"Funds are more than sufficient. But if you delay your visit to the bookstore any further, the spoils would all be split up among others."

Ji Bonong perused the document as his brows scrunched up in surprise. "This time it's... the Truth Union?"

His gaze involuntarily went to the top right corner of his desk, where there were a bunch of similar reports documenting every organization and individual's interaction with the bookstore and their respective outcomes.

The most recent report was regarding the establishment of the Sun's Faith.

Before that, Ji Bonong had always relied on his own intelligence networks. But now, his daughter's intelligence was way more advanced than his...

Chapter 256: Boss Lin Is All Mine!

Chapter 256: Boss Lin Is All Mine!

Ji Bonong read the intelligence report in front of him regarding the Truth Union's 'Mole case' and the Truth-Seekers' strange activities...

Intelligence of these transcendent organizations did not come easily. In the past, while Ji Bonong's understanding of the affairs within the transcendent world was hardly outdated, they were never ahead of time.

Although he had a close relationship with the hidden transcendental world, maybe even part of it since Rolle Resource Development Enterprise employed a large number of transcendent beings and their products included many transcendental objects, he was ultimately still an ordinary being.

Indeed, Ji Bonong was merely an ordinary man.

Or rather, perhaps due to genetics, Northland-ers were generally ordinary beings and could only embark the path of becoming a hunter through the use of sordid blood.

As the sole owner of Rolle Resources, Ji Bonong was reluctant to gamble on that slim chance.

Thus, even though he was a highly reputable man of status and famous among transcendent beings, he was a defenseless ordinary being.

But at least his reputation and status were the reason no one had dared to trifle with him and instead, many of the transcendent beings were willing to do his bidding.

For instance, the employment of Haywood as the Ji Family's family magician, serving as both a mentor and a bodyguard for them.

However, transcendent beings would still lack the respect toward him...

If Haywood were working for a high-level transcendent being, he definitely would not have the guts to resort to any form of trickery, let alone putting up his “Loyalty” seal for sale.

Search Hosted Novel for the original.

Thus, Ji Bonong was still unable to fully integrate himself into the world of the transcendent beings.

No matter how much these people paid him compliments on the surface, they were bound to harbor ill intentions against him.

Under such circumstances, he was destined to never be able to gap that pathetic boundary. After all, in the eyes of the transcendent beings, he was inferior to them and it was no surprise that they would look down on him.

But Ji Zhixiu was different... She was a transcendent being!

If she were to take over Rolle Resource Development, the conglomerate admired by the ordinary would stand a real chance to transform into an entity that even transcendent beings would fear.

From this alone, it was evident that Ji Bonong bore towering expectations for his daughter.

Yet, Ji Zhixiu’s current growth had far exceeded Ji Bonong’s imagination.

To Ji Zhixiu, the world, which was separated from Ji Bonong, seemed to have already been bridged with ease.

While the development of his daughter was extremely comforting for Ji Bonong, he couldn’t help but also develop a vague sense of disappointment that his daughter had grown out of his control.

Ji Bonong had been harboring such feelings ever since Ji Zhixiu duped him two months back.

All of a sudden, his daughter, who was once as mischievous as any other child, had suddenly matured and developed her own perception and views of the world, becoming an independent individual.

But deep down, Ji Bonong still felt that his daughter needed more time to genuinely become a force to be reckoned with.

Ji Bonong hadn't expected his daughter to transform into a complete stranger after a period of not keeping up with Ji Zhixiu's activities due to his heavy workload.

The change in Ji Zhixiu, brought about by the bookstore owner, was way more impactful than he had imagined.

"Our dispute with the Ash Chamber of Commerce has been escalating and we might perhaps have to duke it out in the near future to determine if Rolle Resource Development can further expand its business," explained Ji Bonong.

With his head aching slightly, he went on, "Recently, the Ash Chamber of Commerce has been trying to compete with us on all scales, refusing to provide logistical service for us with a plethora of excuses such as the goods being illegal, etc. This isn't much of a problem, just a temporary delay as I have to be the one making all decisions on this matter."

"Delay?"

Ji Zhixiu raised an eyebrow in dissatisfaction. "Ash Chamber of Commerce is able to have leverage over you because they capitalized on the lack of logistical services offered by Rolle Resources early on. In other words, they are able to reach their current position precisely because the decision-maker for Rolle Resource Development "delayed" their establishment in the Lower District.

"And through this single delay, Rolle Resource Development had such a lucrative business stolen away by the Ash Chamber of Commerce.

“Do you want history to repeat itself again?”

Ji Zhixiu continued solemnly, “I’ve recently discovered that Cherry of the Ash Chamber of Commerce had acquainted herself with Boss Lin way earlier than I did. In fact, the bookstore has been operating under the banner of the Ash Chamber of Commerce, which also means that she has a natural advantage.”

She slammed the table and her expression turned grave.

“Recently, she visited Boss Lin again and re-established communication with the bookstore. This is a race against time if she has the same thing in mind as us, and we cannot afford any delay!”

“Cherry Chapman, the Chapman Witch... She probably doesn’t have that much free time to visit Mr. Lin of the bookstore these days,” muttered Ji Bonong as he stared at the pile of documents on his desk before pulling one out.

“Right now, it is likely that the Ash Chamber of Commerce has obtained the location of another entrance to the underground from those spider-worshipping dark elves.

“This is perhaps the true reason why the Druids, who usually place great importance on pure blood lineage, decided to accept Cherry who has part dark elf blood.”

Ji Bonong rested his chin on his hand and looked toward his daughter. “That also means to say, Rolle Resource Development no longer holds a monopoly on the underground resources now.

“The Ash Chamber of Commerce is intending to release their own series of products to unseat Rolle Resource, or maybe even... in a bid to overthrow us. This has been years in the making, and the entire project is being overseen by Cherry Chapman. She should likely be very busy.”

Ji Zhixiu’s eyes went to that document.

Dark elves, the forest dwelling race that worshiped the Brood-mother, had discovered another entrance in the Brood-mother’s fabled lair. This was one of the only two paths to the underground

from Azir.

And this had happened... a century ago.

Cherry's return wasn't just the start of the plan, but her mixed lineage of druid and dark elf blood had been the foundation of cooperation between the Ash Chamber of Commerce and the dark elves.

From the beginning, they had long hatched the plan to break Rolle Resource Development's monopoly but had kept it in the dark.

Now, a war without gunpowder was about to commence...

Ji Zhixiu couldn't help but let out a heavy sigh upon reading through the document.

These transcendent beings and the long-lived species had such time and patience to devote themselves to a single mission. This was the reason ordinary mortals had no way of defeating them.

If not for her entering the bookstore on that rainy night, Rolle Resource Development would perhaps be greatly impacted, or possibly be completely routed.

But now, Ji Zhixiu smirked and chuckled. "Busy, heh... Isn't that just great?"

In that case, Boss Lin would be all hers.

Chapter 257: The Birthday Party

Chapter 257: The Birthday Party

“Don’t underestimate this matter, Zhixiu. The only reason for Rolle Resource Development’s dominance is the sole developmental rights for the Lower District.

“If another path to the underground is controlled by another organization, Rolle Resource Development would be unseated. Furthermore, given the Ash Chamber of Commerce logistical expertise, their products would flood the market very quickly. At that time, the consequences would be dire...”

As he witnessed her sigh, Ji Bonong continued with a heavy heart, “Rolle Resource Development never had a very strong footing during its establishment. The Ash Chamber of Commerce is formed by an alliance of Druid clans, and the transcendent community recognizes them as one of their own. If their plans come to fruition, a large portion of the transcendent beings will turn to the Ash Chamber of Commerce.

“However, you don’t have to be overly worried. Those true upper echelons of transcendent beings will give us their support, precisely because we are ordinary beings. They can be at ease with the existing monopoly because even with Rolle Resource Development’s success, transcendent beings can reclaim it back at any moment.

“Even if we lose our status of prominence, Rolle Resource must still exist to keep the Ash Chamber of Commerce in check.”

He paused for a moment before continuing, “Ultimately, only after you’ve gained a foothold with your identity as a transcendent being can Rolle Resource Development genuinely thrive in the transcendent world.”

“And before that...”

Ji Zhixiu tossed the document aside, folded her arms and interjected, "Before that, it's best that we focus on stability? Preserve Rolle Resource Development as much as possible and strive to hold out the Ash Chamber of Commerce till the day both parties come to a compromise?"

"But..." Her smile grew wider as she chuckled like a sly fox. "Why go through that trouble?"

Slightly disapproving of her daughter's excessive self-confidence, Ji Bonong retorted with a smile, "While I've not met the bookstore owner personally, it is obvious that he is very powerful from all the intelligence gathered.

"But with the current situation, unless that path is blocked, Rolle Resource Development's monopoly will be at risk. Even if the bookstore owner is capable of doing so, how can you guarantee he'll offer his help? After all, an ordinary old man such as myself doesn't hold any 'potential' for investment.

"Furthermore, blocking that path wouldn't solve the entire problem. This matter is very complicated and requires extensive consideration. If we are slow to act, Rolle Resource Development will possibly lose even more..."

"Perhaps you might think that Daddy is too conservative, but you can't pin too much hope on transcendent beings. In their eyes, we're merely ordinary beings that are akin to ants on the ground. Why would they be willing to ally themselves with ants?"

Ji Bonong spoke with the experience of an old hand as he slumped helplessly against his chair.

Ji Zhixiu shook her head and interrupted her father's droning. "Your line of thought is right and very rational indeed. But in my opinion, you are still underestimating Mr. Lin's influence and his temperament.

"Some of the information was deliberately held back by Secret Rite Tower and it's not convenient for me to reveal it as well. However, you need to understand this; Mr. Lin has surpassed Supreme-rank,

and folk like us are incapable of guessing his intentions.”

Adopting a more serious tone, Ji Zhixiu went on, “I had only just reached Pandemonium-rank when I first came into contact with the bookstore and wasn’t much different from an ordinary human. In the eyes of such a higher being, I was no different from a mere ant.

“If everyone, regardless of whether transcendent or ordinary, is like ants, the joy he derives from ‘toying with ants’ is naturally all about the same.

“Therefore, your worries can be at ease.”

With a smile, Ji Zhixiu added, “As long as you’re willing to turn up for a visit, I think Mr. Lin would be more than willing to offer his help. In fact, he would be glad to.

“Also, Mr. Lin now has a tremendous influence on the major decisions of Secret Rite Tower and the Truth Union. If my guess is right, Vice-Chairman, Andrew, has already become a fan of the bookstore. As long as we successfully win over Mr. Lin, these two factions will be on our side as well.”

Search Hosted Novel for the original.

Ji Bonong had quite an impression of Andrew. At parties held at the manor, this aged lady’s man always stood out among the cold, arrogant scholars of the Truth Union. In fact, the two had even exchanged a few words before.

With the Chairman Maria of the Truth Union in seclusion, the two Vice-Chairmen wielded the highest authority.

According to Ji Zhixiu’s latest intelligence report, it appeared that Andrew was favorite to become the next chief decision-maker of the Truth Union.

This tempted Ji Bonong. If so, with the bookstore owner on their side, Rolle Resource Development would have a very solid backing...

Yet, he still showed signs of hesitation.

The temperaments of a transcendent being were just too uncertain, and even Ji Bonong was still a little doubtful of his daughter's claims despite her confidence.

Moreover, the Ash Chamber of Commerce was hot on their heels, and he couldn't afford to be away. They would be on the back foot if Ji Bonong were to leave, which could lead to great losses. In the worst case scenario, they might be entirely ruined and never recover.

Taking this next step was equivalent to a gamble.

The right bet would provide a future to anticipate eagerly; betting wrong would cause him to lose it all.

Ji Bonong drummed his fingers against the table gently, his expression solemn as he contemplated the situation.

Ji Zhixiu gazed at the external scenery afar, observing the lights illuminating the boundless manor like stars in the night sky. "Most of Rolle Resource Development's current profits come from ordinary beings. These profits and money are indeed immense to ordinary beings, but for the same reason, the transcendent beings are dismissive of Rolle Resource Development because these are things that they can easily gain."

Her voice was hoarse and a tad raspy like the uttering of a demon. "Father, don't you think that you are putting the cart before the horse? Think about what it is that we truly need. Entering the world of transcendent beings.

"As long as Rolle Resource Development manages to secure the distribution rights of the books of the bookstore, forget about just entering that world. Transcendent beings would willingly come begging on their knees..."

Her eyes burned brightly as she added on, "Those books are the true treasure, the opportunity that Rolle Resource Development needs to gain the respect of transcendent beings!

"As long as we are able to rise to a higher level and gain a foothold,

all these current profits don't mean a thing; that's being too narrow-minded. The Ash Chamber of Commerce will pay for their lack of foresight.

“And Father, you worrying about worldly material gains is the obstacle hindering Rolle Resource Development's path to success!”

As if a flash of enlightenment had struck him, Ji Bonong stood up vigorously and exclaimed through gritted teeth, “Let's take this gamble!”

He placed his palm on the documents on the table and swept all the unaddressed documents regarding the decisions and activities of the Ash Chamber of Commerce to the floor as he told Ji Zhixiu that he would pay the bookstore owner a visit the next day.

Then, following a sudden, brief pause, he revealed a fanatical smirk. “Since we're doing it, why not spice it up — Zhixiu, are you confident in inviting Mr. Lin to attend your 20th birthday party?”

Chapter 258: Opportunity

Chapter 258: Opportunity

Even though it had been a while since any banquets had been held at A16 Manor, many people were already looking forward to the upcoming party that would definitely be held under any circumstances.

Because this was the heiress of the Ji Family, Ji Zhixiu's 20th birthday.

Regardless of how intense the dispute between the Ash Chamber of Commerce and Rolle Resource was, Ji Zhixiu's birthday party would still proceed as planned.

Similar to how certain aristocratic families sold their every possession to create a false image of their extravagant lifestyle while barely making ends meet, the Ji Family, owner of Rolle Resource Development, had to do the same and put up a strong front.

If Rolle Resource Development didn't do it for the sake of their face, it would imply that they were already forced into a dead end without any chance of a turnaround.

And that would be truly embarrassing.

Therefore, even if they were in a state of emergency, the birthday party had to go on. In fact, it needed to be much more glamorous than the previous ones.

Besides, everyone was now aware that Ji Zhixiu was the leader of a hunter organization and the likely successor of Rolle Resource Development Enterprise. This would attract significant attention, and it was an opportunity to showcase herself to the outside world...

Of course, this 'showcase' wasn't just to display her talents and

ambition.

Rather, Ji Bonong's initial plan was for Ji Zhixiu to be as rebellious as possible, displaying a complete disinterest in Rolle Resource Development. Instead, he wanted her to appear as if she was solely intent on trying to find her place in the world of transcendent beings by running the hunter organization, without sparing any thought for her family business.

Ji Bonong would then profess the friction between him and his daughter and seek another successor within another of the Ji Family with reluctance.

It was a ruse.

In truth, over the years, Ji Bonong had intentionally estranged his daughter in front of outsiders, distancing her away from anything related to Rolle Resource Development to enable her freedom to develop herself in the transcendent sphere.

Only then would those people let their guard down against Rolle Resource Development...

But things were different now.

If they could gain the bookstore owner's favor, they could do away with the theatrics and expedite Ji Zhixiu's succession of Rolle Resource Development, transforming it into a true transcendent organization.

In fact, with the bookstore's support, Rolle Resource would gain an unparalleled advantage and have brighter prospects before them.

Being a businessman, Ji Bonong was willing to risk it all so long as the reward justified the risks.

Right now, all he lacked was a lever to kick start his master plan.

His hopeful gaze fell upon his daughter who had never failed him.

But Ji Zhixiu shook her head helplessly. "I'm not confident of that."

She knew what her father's intention was.

So long they could have Mr. Lin grace the party with his presence, even if it's just a show of face, that was more than sufficient to show everyone that the bookstore owner was on their side.

This was a message.

With this, regardless of whatever Rolle Resource Development involved themselves with in the future, those transcendent beings would have to first carefully consider whether they could handle the wrath of the bookstore owner... and evidently, even a Supreme-rank wasn't a match for Mr. Lin.

Though it sounded like a perfect plan, it was much more difficult in reality.

Ji Zhixiu could only shatter her father's beautiful dream as she reminded him, "As of now, based on available intelligence, Mr. Lin seldom leaves the bookstore and his only purpose of leaving was for 'role playing,' or some daily activities... Till date, no one has ever attempted making Boss Lin leave the bookstore."

"Just because no one has tried doesn't mean that it's impossible. Isn't that right?"

Ji Bonong gazed firmly at his daughter. "Give it a shot. I'm a mortal without any transcendent abilities, yet Rolle Resource Development was able to make a name for itself via the development of the Lower District. The Lower District is a place filled with treasure, coveted even by transcendent beings, who themselves fear entering. The founders of Rolle Resource Development only managed to gain access by paying with their lives."

Isolated from the world, the Lower District was a mystery. Apart from the employees of Rolle Resource Development operating there, no one knew what it looked like.

To the transcendent beings, that place was a forbidden area because of the Great Pestilence during the Dark Age. The fear stemmed from the fact that a transcendent being was more susceptible to being

infected by the horrifying plague the higher ranked they were.

And that was why Rolle Resource Development was being run by ordinary beings.

But at the same time, with all sorts of relics from ancient times and rare minerals hidden in the Lower District, it was inevitable that some transcendent beings would take the risk to explore the area.

As Ji Bonong narrated, he inserted the ring on his finger into a slot on the wall.

Click.

With the soft click, cracks suddenly appeared on the surface of the walls of the room, with light spilling out, forming a dazzling array that covered the entire room.

Shortly after, the walls opened, revealing a secret chamber.

Ji Zhixiu was momentarily taken aback by the scene before her. In all her twenty years living here, she had never known the existence of this secret chamber.

Even with her current peak Pandemonium-rank ability and ‘Steel Resolve,’ she had never noticed this array formation. This meant that it was capable of escaping even a Destructive-rank’s detection.

And with Rolle Resource Development being watched closely over the years, perhaps even the Supreme-ranks had been fooled...

It was unbelievable.

But what surprised Ji Zhixiu further were the items within the secret chamber.

Ji Bonong beckoned his daughter to keep up with him as he stepped forward, disappearing into the darkness.

Ji Zhixiu followed her father into the secret chamber, and her eyes lit up at the sight before her. Contrary to what she had imagined, it wasn’t a typical dark and eerie secret room but was instead more

like a neat and tidy museum filled with runic drawings.

In the hollowed-out niches on the perfectly aligned shelves by the walls laid all sorts of mysterious objects.

Ji Zhixiu's eyelids twitched. These objects spooked her out.

Some even caused her to hallucinate, and it was only thanks to 'Steel Resolve' was she able to stabilize her mind.

This novel is available on Hosted Novel.

She couldn't help looking anxiously at her ordinary father, though he same composed and not the least bit affected.

It's probably because of that ring , thought Ji Zhixiu.

This immense collection of transcendent objects certainly wasn't built in a day.

It seemed like the many generations of leaders of past Rolle Resource Development had it all planned since the beginning...

"Here are the spoils of relics from those ancient times obtained by Rolle Resource Development during the expedition underground. Our forebears managed to construct this house and kept the transcendent beings in the dark with the help of this 'Hermit's Ring.' Everything that is sealed here is awaiting an opportunity."

Ji Bonong spread his arms wide, then turned to face his daughter. "And now, my dear daughter, the opportunity has arrived."

Chapter 259: Wine Of Immortality

Chapter 259: Wine of Immortality

Ji Zhixiu looked all around.

Any of these transcendent objects sitting on the shelves, each sealed in a different way, would easily cause a stir amongst transcendent beings... the only difference being the extent.

After all, the value of these objects excavated from the Lower District wasn't just from their uses alone.

These... were remains from ancient times, 'fossils' of civilization that had existed for many millennia!

Ji Zhixiu had never seen the likes of most of these things here. This also meant to say that the methods of creation and craftsmanship of these objects had probably been lost in time.

Perhaps each of these objects here could be the only one of their kind still in existence.

One of a kind meant that such objects would be trump cards if used as a weapon or sorcery tool in battle since no one would know their capabilities.

Moreover, Ji Zhixiu could sense that most of these objects were dangerous. Any one of these items could easily qualify as the finale item at an Ash Chamber of Commerce auction.

The combination of unique and raw power would drive any transcendent being crazy for it.

And to those scholars of the Truth Union, the value of such objects would be further increased multiple folds.

The historical value of these relics from the underground was

unimaginable. Coming from many millennia ago, these ancient remains were the best representations of what it was like during that time.

In other words, these objects fell right into the category of 'Information regarding the earlier times, especially the Second Era' which Mr. Lin was greatly intrigued by, as documented in the intelligence reports.

It's all thanks to previous generations of Rolle Resource Development leaders feathering their nests. Ji Zhixiu couldn't help but think like this as she studied the transcendent objects intently.

This extensive collection definitely started with the founders as they gradually built it up to such a jaw-dropping scale.

Ji Zhixiu knew that there had been plenty of conflicts between the successors and their predecessors in the past. In fact, some even resorted to killing their predecessors to take over.

Yet, miraculously, these people decided to follow the tradition upon discovering the collection of relics and passing them down to the succeeding generations.

Perhaps each generation of Rolle Resource Development heads all went through the stage of feeling being mere pawns of the transcendent beings despite being in a position of power. No matter how hard they tried, they remained to be scorned in the eyes of others.

Thus, when the first person acquired the Hermit's Ring, this ambition was ignited and a bold thought surfaced in his mind.

He then decided to secretly smuggle those excavated transcendent objects by concealing its trace with the Hermit's Ring and hid it in a secret room.

With a careful selection of appropriate transcendent objects and the use of discrete magic arrays, this secret chamber was made as such.

More and more objects were being cautiously placed in the secret chamber, but due to the watchful eyes of the transcendent beings,

there was never an opportunity to realize this ambition.

Therefore, this mortal ambition could only be passed on to the next successor.

And like this, objects within the secret chamber started to accumulate over generations, as though biding time and waiting... till now.

Ji Zhixiu gazed at her father. The middle aged man's eyes were brimming with a glimmer of hope, or perhaps insanity, as his aged face appeared to have been revitalized.

This chamber housed more than just relics from the ancient times; it also carried the will of successive generations of past Rolle Resource Development heads.

The long-awaited opportunity they had been waiting for had finally arrived!

Ji Bonong led the way, giving a brief summary of every single relic to Ji Zhixiu. Even though the heads of Rolle Resource Development were mere ordinary mortals, being in frequent contact with the transcendent beings meant that their judgment and knowledge were far superior than the average transcendent being.

Needless to say, with most of the collection being accumulated over the generations, the succeeding generations could always work on the problems faced by the preceding generations, and eventually, time would solve most.

But there were still some problems that would remain unsolved.

Reaching the dead center of the secret chamber, the father and daughter pair were met with three objects, which were also the very three that intimidated Ji Zhixiu.

"These three objects are the most valuable ones in the entire chamber."

Ji Bonong pointed to a golden apple on the shelf as he began explaining, "We call this the 'Fruit of Conflict.' Once unsealed, an

urge to possess it will manifest in anyone who catches a glimpse of it. Brothers would fight, and spouses would quarrel; all till one party perishes.

“Although it appears to be edible... no one has dared to taste it. Till today, we have no idea what the effects of consuming it are.”

After a brief pause, he continued, “We lost many of our people back when we first obtained it, much more than any other item here. Later on, a Destructive-rank dream beast was summoned to act as a cover and many more were sacrificed.”

Goosebumps appeared on Ji Zhixiu’s skin when she heard the story. Despite Ji Bonong’s brief description, it was obvious that anyone that had caught a glimpse of this golden apple back then had met their end. An overwhelming amount of blood had been spilled just to conceal its existence.

It appeared that every single transcendent object here was tainted with blood.

Ji Bonong proceeded to point at a prismatic red ruby located on top of a customized Y-shaped rack. The ruby was the size of a palm and was rotating slowly while levitating in the air. The core appeared hollow with only a third of the unknown, red viscous liquid remaining within.

Glancing at the prismatic earring on his daughter’s earlobe, Ji Bonong went on, “This is the ‘Wine of Immortality,’ and it comes together with ‘Chalice,’ the earring that I have given to you on the day you decided to become a hunter.”

Ji Zhixiu subconsciously rubbed the icy cold jewelry on her ear.

Ji Bonong gazed at his daughter kindly and continued, “The ‘Wine of Immortality’ doesn’t grant immortality. But, upon the death of the bearer of the ‘Chalice,’ he would resurrect in close proximity to the ‘Wine of Immortality.’ Once this revival is enacted, a third of the liquid inside would be consumed. Prior to now, it has already been used twice, which also means...”

“There is only one final chance of revival left... Father,” Ji Zhixiu mumbled meekly.

“Haha, everything here can be used as a bargaining chip, with the exception of the ‘Wine of Immortality.’ ” chuckled Ji Bonong as he patted his daughter’s shoulder before moving over to the final object.

This was the most ordinary-looking object in the storage, yet it was placed in the most important position.

Find the original at Hosted Novel.

Ji Zhixiu’s eyes fell upon what appeared to be a fragment of a stone tablet. On it were inscriptions of ancient runes that seemed like a burning blaze.

“This is a fragment of the ‘Bonfire Tablet.’ We haven’t found any tangible use for it, but... according to some clues, our guess is that this fragment is connected to Life, the Primordial Witch that controls fire.”

Chapter 260: Mission Accomplished

Chapter 260: Mission Accomplished

The Primordial Witches, as legends have it, were the strongest life-form born from chaos, who controlled the rules which governed the world.

Silver who controlled frost; Walpurgis who presided over the night; Life who ruled fire; and Fraxinus who controlled trees.

With that being said, it was common knowledge that the four Primordial Witches controlled more than just the existence of these specific things. If that were so, the term ‘Primordial’ wouldn’t be all that fitting.

Generations of scholars had come up with a standardized explanation after thousands of years studying these legends.

Frost represents four seasons; time.

Night represents the sky; the heavens.

Flame represents destruction and rebirth; destiny.

Trees represent paths and connections; space.

Only put in this way could the four Primordial Witches be said to control everything in this world.

Were there an entrance examination for transcendent beings, this would be an obligatory question of general knowledge and a giveaway question at that.

All knowledge regarding the Primordial Witches that Ji Zhixiu had ran through her mind as she stared at that un-extraordinary stone tablet.

After the darkness of the dream realm engulfed Azir, the Primordial Witches were incapable of putting up a resistance however mighty they were.

All they could do was construct the Wall of Fog to prevent the incursion of the dream realm from continuing. Even then, they had to remain in slumber within the dream realm and disappeared without a trace.

Ji Zhixiu knew of some of the old family clans that still remained true to their covenants.

For instance, the great elven sage who had once saved Ji Zhixiu and visited the bookstore on her recommendation was from the Iris Clan, who were devout followers of Silver.

And the Sandra Clan, a family of arcanum medicine experts who had recently met with a mishap, were followers of Walpurgis.

These two Primordial Witches were the most well-known, having made the most covenants with various clans and leaving behind even more anointed. However, the former only accepted species with long lifespans, while the latter's anointed were mostly mortals.

In comparison, the two remaining witches were much more mysterious.

According to the legends, Fraxinus was the main creator of the high Wall of Fog.

Though the truth was now blurred, the interior of the high walls of gray fog was essentially a series of gargantuan tree trunks and branches according to the last person who entered the Wall of Fog.

Thus, there was also another legend that claimed that instead of being in slumber within the dream realm, Fraxinus had morphed into the Wall of Fog itself.

Those believers of the Church of Pestilence could therefore be considered followers of Fraxinus.

However, the Church of Pestilence long removed anything about

the Witches from their faith and denied this ideology, throwing those who claimed otherwise into the high Wall of Fog.

As for Life, all that remained were mere phrases...

Ji Bonong picked up the fragment and narrated, "It was said that Lady Life once erected countless 'Bonfire Tablets' at the fringes of the darkness that was already infected by the dream realm for those warriors fighting to the end. Those stone tablets were bonfires, lighting up the land within the darkness, temporarily exiling dream beasts, and allowing those warriors a moment to catch their breaths.

"Yet the bonfires eventually extinguished, and those stone tablets collapsed shortly after due to the immense might of the dream realm, turning into a pile of useless stone pieces.

"Just like this one," said Ji Bonong as he raised the fragment up.

After carefully scrutinizing the fragment, Ji Zhixiu asked, "So this fragment is capable of resisting dream beasts?"

"I don't know."

Ji Bonong gave a crisp perfunctory answer.

He shook his head, then continued, "There are some conjectures, all from former Rolle Resource Development heads with regards to the runes on this fragment that were studied in secret... I heard about it from my predecessor, but I doubt they dared outright test their hypothesis on it.

"But if it really is the case, then this Mr. Lin would surely be greatly fascinated."

As he placed the fragmented piece into his daughter's hands, Ji Bonong sighed. "I will claim to be ill tomorrow and make a trip to the bookstore together with you to fight for the distribution rights of the bookstore books. Hopefully, everything will be smooth sailing."

"Yes." Ji Zhixiu nodded.

Andrew's mind was still thinking about the deal he had struck with Hood as he stood in front of the bookstore.

The Wisdom-Seekers would soon become his newly formed team, and in return, he would use his reputation to vouch for them and gradually develop a cadre by selecting promising members from within.

With the same goal, aligned ideology, and working toward the right direction, both Hood and Andrew were complementary to each other and both sides hit it off well.

The most resilient and united faction within the Truth Union was thus covertly formed in the office where Jerome had met his end.

They had decided on a rough plan on the spot, and a sweeping net was about to be cast over the entire Truth Union.

The first step was to follow the trail, leveraging on the fact that Jerome's death hadn't yet been publicized, to eradicate the remaining moles.

Second, that would be to rapidly expand the Wisdom-Seekers, turning it into the greatest faction within the Truth Union in the shortest time possible and then controlling the entire organization.

And the final objective was to either elect Andrew as the Chairman of the Truth Union or turn Maria into the figurehead of the Wisdom-Seekers.

Having already experienced the difficulty in climbing to such a high status within the Truth Union, Andrew naturally knew that this was no easy feat. But since it's the will of Mr. Lin, he would have to do it to the best of his abilities.

Hood, on the other hand, was well aware of his position. Knowing that he wasn't of leadership material, he had no intentions of vying with Andrew over the position of Chairman and was content with being an assistant.

Andrew felt that this former young brat before him had undergone a complete transformation.

This must all be attributed to Mr. Lin's efforts.

Hood was a rebellious dandy once upon a time, relying entirely on Maria's influence to rise up in the Truth-seekers and have a bunch of followers willing to do his bidding.

Only Mr. Lin could make him turn over a new leaf and be born anew, as if completely transforming into a different person, from foolish to wise, humble, and powerful.

Search Hosted Novel for the original.

Mr. Lin's wisdom is able to cleanse the dirt within our souls, purifying it with virtue.

Hood renaming the Truth-seekers to Wisdom-Seekers couldn't have been any more appropriate!

Andrew reaffirmed the awe and passion deep within him as the white halo in his eyes seemed to solidify. Through the windows, he could faintly make out row after row of books and his grip on the philosopher's stone in his hand tightened.

Although the harsh winds of the winter were approaching and the chilling air smelled of frost, Andrew's heart beat with a blazing passion.

There is absolutely no need for the existence of the Truth Union if we are unable to spread this wisdom to every corner of Azir!

Andrew embraced the thought as he stepped into the bookstore and placed the philosopher's stone on the counter.

Then, he exclaimed, "Mission accomplished. I've brought Jerome over."

Chapter 261: Pearl Milk Tea

Chapter 261: Pearl Milk Tea

At this moment, Lin Jie was sitting behind the counter as he usually did. He was briefly taken aback upon hearing these words, and he watched somewhat sheepishly as Andrew offered up a blood-red crystal with both hands.

His lips twitched as he couldn't help but silently jibe, *Isn't Jerome already deceased? How could you even bring him over?*

That's impossible unless you brought back his dead body. However, this isn't Jerome's corpse, only what appears to be a philosopher's stone refined by the Path of the Flaming Sword.

But...

Since Jerome was already dead, it meant that Andrew hadn't quite accomplished the task I had asked of him. Considering how confident he was at that time, this was quite a disgrace for the Vice-Chairman of the Truth Union.

This philosopher's stone, being an incriminating evidence against the Path of the Flaming Sword, is to some degree a representation of the deceased Jerome.

Thus, it is only natural that Andrew would let this philosopher's stone assume Jerome's identity and use such a 'slip of tongue' to amuse me while completely neutralizing any embarrassment.

I really never expected Vice-Chairman Andrew to have such a good sense of humor.

Since the Vice-Chairman was unwilling to bring up such an awkward failure, Lin Jie decided to play along and prolong this humor.

Lin Jie noticed the shocking realization in Andrew's eyes but

continued to smile without batting an eyelid. "Good work, thank you for going through that trouble."

He got quite a few tricks up his sleeve and certainly lives up to his reputation as a Vice-Chairman.

Previously, he showed up to humbly apologize without putting up any airs to resolve the incident caused by Hood's bunch. Now, he's able to miraculously dissolve this awkwardness with such an earnest attitude as if he were more a servant rather than a customer... Could this be a ploy he employs to win over people's hearts?

I have to say it feels rather great, though.

While these thoughts were going through his mind, Lin Jie put down the cup of milk tea in his hand and picked up the glistening red gem.

Andrew heaved a sigh of relief, feeling as though a heavy burden had just been lifted off his shoulders. *Indeed, Boss Lin meant for me to bring over the philosopher's stone refined from Jerome's essence when he asked me to "Bring Jerome over to me."*

Speaking of which... This was intentionally placed in the crime scene. Was it meant as a show of goodwill toward Boss Lin?

Seems like the Path of the Flaming Sword is really afraid of Boss Lin. I just wonder what Boss Lin thinks of this mysterious and scary organization that suddenly emerged out of nowhere...

Andrew positioned himself to take a seat at the tall stool at the counter while these thoughts were rampant in his mind. At that moment, that strange and never-seen-before beverage caught his attention.

Red tea and milk. Though there were some differences, it was still the same combination for milk tea that was common everywhere. But kneading tapioca flour into balls and adding them into milk tea... was an unprecedented yet novel and intriguing combination.

Besides being an academic, Andrew was an aristocrat and food connoisseur at the same time. His pursuit for enjoyment never

stopped.

It could be said that Andrew had tried almost every food in Azir, no matter how rare or expensive they were.

Yet, he had never come across a beverage as such.

While staring at the milk tea, he had gained a large amount of information about it instantly, and his mind was already simulating the taste and texture of this milk tea.

Interesting... and novel.

But for some reason, as Andrew stared into the transparent cup, the vague black pearls inside strangely started to resemble jet black eyeballs that were rolling...

A vaguely strange and frightening sensation overcame Andrew the more he looked at it. *It's terrifying... But only such beverages are worthy of Boss Lin's taste buds, I guess?*

He fell into silence at the thought.

Noticing Andrew engrossed by his milk tea, Lin Jie picked up the cup and gave it a gentle shake. "The book cafe started selling pearl tea today. If you're interested, you could get one next door and try it. Perhaps you'll be pleasantly surprised."

That's right, the book cafe had finally launched a new business project — pearl milk tea.

Lin Jie had already started experimenting a few weeks back. After all, just the interior design and books alone were far from sufficient for the cafe to have its own distinctiveness.

Support us at Hosted Novel.

Therefore, Lin Jie had his sights on beverages.

After all, this was a drink popularized everywhere in his former world, drawing in countless teenagers and brands famous on the internet flooding the market with new concoctions one after

another.

Replicating these past successes seemed very likely in this world that greatly resembled Earth.

Lin Jie had never tried those fanciful new mixtures of teas and had no inkling on how to make them. However, what he did have was some basic understanding of a classic like pearl milk tea.

Together with the always capable student Mu'en, the original taste was replicated after a few experiments once Lin Jie had provided her a general description.

Then, according to the market research, which was conducted with the help of the followers of the Sun's Faith, they had slowly revised the taste to one which would be broadly accepted by the masses.

And today was the official launch of this product.

Someone of Andrew's age and experience probably wouldn't be too keen on a treat like pearl milk tea, but since he happened to come by today, Lin Jie would naturally pull out all the stops in soliciting sales...

Someone as humorous and understanding as Vice-Chairman Andrew would most likely support the book cafe's business. Lin Jie didn't say more and remained smiling while thinking this way.

And in fact, Andrew was so flattered as he nodded his head vigorously and exclaimed excitedly, "It's my honor to be of service to Mr. Lin!"

Lin Jie felt as though Andrew had become more of a lackey on his return.

But having said that, this might have possibly been due to the power of the book. ***The Alchemist*** appeared to have allowed the Vice-Chairman to find his own destiny as he now radiated with confidence and self-belief.

With his smile still not letting up, Lin Jie replied affably, "You are way too polite. Every customer of mine is like my best friend. We

can totally converse and behave like friends.”

Andrew replied with utmost respect, “I understand, Mr. Lin.”

No, you understood nuts...

Lin Jie’s eyelid twitched slightly before he sighed as he fiddled with the red gem. “Jerome committed heinous crimes and deserved his death. However, he should be served his justice and not dealt with privately.

“It’s possible that the Path of the Flaming Sword chose to kill him to keep their secrecy and prevent him from leaking more information.

“With regards to this pitfall, there probably still are moles within the Truth Union. I suggest you clean it up as soon as possible and nip things in the bud.

Lin Jie spun the philosopher’s stone refined from Jerome’s essence on his fingertips, making it radiate a faint rainbow glow. “I think it’s about time you guys pick up the pace regarding Prima’s sister. Otherwise, if unable to handle it, how about having Joseph do it?”

Lin Jie glanced up at Andrew and gave him a reassuring smile.

The Truth Union wouldn’t air their dirty laundry in public and Lin Jie could understand, but Joseph was essentially a professional.

However, Andrew’s face turned as white as a sheet.

Chapter 262: Great, You Are Spirited!

Chapter 262: Great, You Are Spirited!

If unable to handle it, how about having Joseph do it?

Andrew's face paled immediately. He was well aware of the implied meaning and it couldn't be any more obvious. This was the bookstore owner saying, "I don't have a need for incompetent people. You have no value to me if you aren't able to solve the problem quickly. Plenty others are willing to be at my service and would naturally fight for your position if you are incapable of doing so!"

Joseph, a former Great Radiant Knight and current chief of the Intelligence Division at Secret Rite Tower. An absolute force among Destructive-ranks, he was on par with Andrew in all aspects, and perhaps might even be more suitable.

In other words, he was absolutely capable enough to replace Andrew in investigating this matter.

The Truth Union had started their own investigations without alerting Secret Rite Tower, but if the bookstore owner asked, Secret Rite Tower would naturally be able to act unimpeded.

And it was precisely because Margaret had gotten into some trouble that Andrew got this opportunity to redeem himself for his previous disrespect to the bookstore owner and pledge his loyalty to him.

If the bookstore owner were to change his mind now, who knows whether these old debts might be revisited. And if things were to go south, the punishment would be even more severe.

Whatever value Andrew had would be lost instantaneously.

Once a tool has lost its value, the consequences are simple...

Only death awaits a forsaken pawn!

As such, Andrew was scared out of his wits that he nearly fell to his knees. He instantly cried out in panic, "I will do my absolute best to locate Margaret, please do not worry about it!

"This perpetrator possesses quite some inconceivable ability, so we weren't able to detect him or obtain any clues. However, someone of his level couldn't possibly act out against us all the time... After this incident, the existing moles that infiltrated the Truth Union would feel compelled to take action. We can single every one of them out by laying a trap beforehand."

He then went on, "Furthermore, now Joseph has only just announced his un-retirement and must be extremely busy trying to regain his former status. He probably wouldn't have the time and energy...

"I'm not saying that he's incapable, but there's a limit to everyone's energy. I'm also more familiar with the Truth Union which would make it more convenient to investigate and carry out any necessary actions."

Andrew unleashed everything in a single breath while both terrified yet eager to prove his worth.

This wasn't just the fear of losing his value and being abandoned.

More so was the fear of being unable to continue serving Mr. Lin, his lord and savior... Indeed, that was his only value and heart's ambition. Losing these would be even more frightening than losing his life.

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow as he watched Andrew seemingly overreacting.

Does this Truth Union Vice-Chairman have a feud with Joseph?
wondered Lin Jie.

Why else would he react so greatly and have a drastic change in expression the moment I mentioned requesting Joseph's help...

He insists against it as if he would die if Joseph were to take over the investigation and even sneakily insinuated that Joseph was incapable.

But then again, there might possibly be some internal reasons as to why the Truth Union didn't go to the police after such a major incident. And from what I know so far, it appears that the Truth Union is at odds with Secret Rite Tower, the secret organization within the police force...

If that's the case, as a member of the Truth Union, Andrew being unwilling to seek help from Joseph is understandable.

But anyway, it looks like Joseph has decided to make a comeback, once more aiming for an even higher locus of power, eh.

Phew... It seems like the previous session of therapy was really effective.

Lin Jie nodded silently. After the incident with the Church of the Dome, Joseph had practically emerged from behind the scenes in the Intelligence Department to once more step onto the main stage again,

We are Hosted Novel, find us on google.

Under such circumstances, there was always a threat to Joseph and the Sun's Faith from those once in league with the Church of the Dome that hadn't yet been eradicated.

Moreover, those that Joseph might have upset in the past while with Secret Rite Tower would once cast their gazes back onto him.

Continuing to maintain the nonchalant stance of a soon-to-be retiree might actually have put him and his family in grave danger.

Thus, Lin Jie was elated to hear Joseph coming to his decision of making a comeback.

...It definitely wasn't because his powerful ally had gotten stronger. Absolutely not.

Lin Jie's thoughts had wandered for a moment, and when he came back down to earth, he realized that Andrew was still nervously trying his utmost to convince him that he was the best candidate for

this investigation.

“Alright, alright, Vice-Chairman Andrew.”

Boss Lin didn't know whether to laugh or cry as he rubbed his face that had gotten cramped up after smiling for a prolonged period. “There's no need to tell me all this. I can't be the one deciding who is to take charge of this investigation after all, and this is just a mere suggestion. Furthermore, don't you think that it's more practical for you to be seeking clues instead of explaining all this to me?”

Andrew froze and fell into panic.

It's over... I've said too much, making Mr. Lin annoyed!

This was both a warning and a nudge to hasten his progress. More so, this was an ultimatum. This was Mr. Lin offering him one final chance!

I understand!

Talk is cheap, I can only prove it with tangible action!

Andrew stood up and exclaimed loudly, “I will get to the bottom of this matter! Please wait to witness it!”

Though Lin Jie wasn't too sure what had stirred up Andrew, it didn't stop him from providing encouragement to a customer that was brimming with positivity.

Thus, he stood up, giving Andrew a firm pat on his shoulders and an approving nod. “Great, you are spirited! I'll be awaiting your good news!”

Andrew's body sunk down as he felt an unbearably powerful force on him, which startled him. A shiver went down his spine as he saw the look of approval on Lin Jie's face, but this made an unprecedented feeling of determination well up inside him.

No one was going to stop him from exterminating every single one of those pests from the Path of the Flaming Sword!

“Oh right, don’t forget to have a cup of pearl milk tea next door. Please spread the word around if it’s good.”

Lin Jie changed the topic and unflinchingly retrieved a discount voucher from the drawer with a smirk. “There’s a half price discount for its launch, limited to the first hundred cups, first come, first served.”

Andrew left the bookstore feeling fired up. As he cautiously exited, he suddenly turned toward the book cafe next door.

He glanced down at the voucher in his hand, then walked to the doors of the cafe and pushed the doors wide open.

Since these are Boss Lin’s words, even buying some milk tea would have a profound significance...

Andrew arrived before the counter and saw Mu’en who was hard at work preparing milk tea. This assistant of Boss Lin’s who had seemed somewhat familiar previously was now even more so.

Wait a minute...

Andrew had a flashback as he recalled where he had seen this teenage girl.

Chapter 263: Unattainable Mastery Of Alchemy

Chapter 263: Unattainable Mastery of Alchemy

Andrew had a good memory.

Or rather, a good memory was a trait all scholars had.

As two paths of transcendent beings, scholars and magicians were similar to an extent.

Magicians manipulated aether through ‘expression.’

Regardless of whether it was the ‘language’ used by black magicians or the ‘characters’ white magicians employed, these were both expressions of willpower and desire, ultimately turning into pathways of magic through the power endowed by aether.

Similarly, scholars manipulated aether through ‘learning.’

Through their innate knowledge of aether — knowledge representing the rules of the world, by itself, an ‘expression’ of the world’s will — exploration, memorization, fusion, application, and finally transferring the power of aether to the products constructed with all this knowledge serving as the foundation.

These products covered all aspects, ranging from weapons, buildings, arcanum medicine, and much more.

Since the emergence of scholars, their status among transcendent beings was unshakable precisely because both ordinary and transcendent beings could no longer live without many of these products.

This was the indispensable value of scholars, which was also the sole reason the Truth Union could, to a certain extent, control the transcendent community.

These two classes both relied on aether flow. Other transcendent classes mostly did so too, but each had their own unique aspects.

On the surface, magicians and scholars had an obvious similarity — a good mind.

Through the process of continuous ‘expression’ and ‘learning,’ the organ with the most frequent contact with aether was their brain.

Aether flowed in and out through their brain in large amounts, resulting in sort of ‘erosion.’

As such, the brains of scholars were gradually affected, resulting in an irreversible change that intensified the higher level they got.

Most scholars had physical capabilities no different from an ordinary being and could only achieve superior physical strength through specially-created exoskeleton armor or prosthetics.

But when it came to the brain, scholars were vastly superior to other classes of transcendent beings, followed after by magicians.

And memory was a crucial aspect of this.

Andrew was certain that he remembered right.

He had indeed seen this teenage girl who resembled a thin daffodil in the past, even before he had come across the bookstore.

In his mind, memories began splicing at breakneck speed, as though a movie was being rewind frame after frame.

Eventually, the flashbacks stopped at the scene of a dimly-lighted laboratory.

Within rows of fixed transparent tanks, young, fragile homunculi relied on various nutrition fluids for sustenance. Blank eyes stared at the outside world while their thoughts and souls were incomplete. These were either incomplete or rather, failed products that were unable to think independently.

Even with the doors of the laboratory opened, the commotion of

people moving in and out didn't lead to any reaction from them.

Andrew was clustered among quite a few people as he smiled while being led through the crowd.

As a Vice-Chairman, Andrew always had people trying to win over his favor, but he was more interested in what to have for dinner than these people.

While putting up a patronizing yet polite smile, his gaze fell upon faces of the homunculi in the transparent jars with an array of tubes attached to them. At this point, he was just on a usual duty of being updated on the progress of the 'Clay Idol' project.

Ever since this capital intensive project was approved a few years back, Andrew had routine monthly surveys of this laboratory, which has been jointly established by the mechanics and alchemists.

However, much to his disappointment, there had yet to be any successful homunculi made by the laboratory over the past few years.

Though a project on creating homunculus was an extremely difficult task, even for the Truth Union, this intense resource consumption was getting a bit too much to bear...

In fact, when he thought about it later on, Andrew found it strange that there hadn't been a single objection throughout the Truth Union when such an absurd plan was proposed. On the contrary, it had been a unanimous decision that everyone gleefully made.

The Truth Union had talents from every discipline and an enormous amount of capital after all.

Even so, resources weren't finite... The Truth Union too wouldn't give up the research of other disciplines just to focus solely on the 'Clay Idol' project that had slim chances of success.

Furthermore, the rate at which various grades of philosopher's stones were being consumed was alarming.

The basis of this ‘Clay Idol’ project had been that the Truth Union could already produce low-grade philosopher’s stones.

Before this, even producing a low-grade philosopher’s stone the size of a rice grain was already a mind-boggling challenge for a Pandemonium-ranked scholar. For scholars specializing in alchemy, the typical benchmark for mastery was the ability to create low-grade philosopher’s stone.

If the alchemy examination were a test, the creation of a low-grade philosopher’s stone would be the final question. Most people might not even comprehend such a question and grasp blindly at straws.

Therefore, most scholars in the discipline of alchemy would never attain mastery throughout their lives...

We are Hosted Novel, find us on google.

Yet, the Truth Union gathered a group of elite scholars and with their collective effort, managed to produce low-grade philosopher’s stones, which was an amazing feat by itself.

Afterwards, the ‘Clay Idol’ project commenced.

Andrew’s quick glance lingered on a transparent tank labeled S-277. The homunculus floating in the bubbling nutrition fluid had a pale, puerile face, yet Andrew could sense a tad of familiarity from it.

He left shortly after and did not give any extra attention to such an ordinary homunculus.

Yet, at the present moment, as this flashback replayed, Andrew realized that the homunculus appeared to have tilted her head and cast a gaze upon the nearest scholar ever so slightly. It had been so brief that it seemed like just an illusion.

“Hello, what would you like to have? Here is the menu.”

A pale, slender hand pushed a piece of paper toward Andrew. “Our milk tea is newly launching today, but unfortunately the discount vouchers for the first hundred customers have already been distributed...”

Andrew snapped back to reality, raising his head to meet the jet black pupils of the young bookstore assistant's gaze.

The same indifference, the same look.

S-277!

That's right, this bookstore assistant was part of the second batch of homunculi he had briefly caught a glimpse of back at the laboratory.

A storm brewed within Andrew's mind.

Back when the laboratory came under attack, a total of three homunculi went missing, including S-277. It was initially thought that these three had been stolen together, but S-277 had unexpectedly become an assistant at the bookstore.

Could it be that Mr. Lin was already aware of what the Path of the Flaming Sword's plans were back then even though the Truth Union was still in the dark?!

Otherwise, how could he have gotten a homunculus to be his assistant amidst the attack that no one saw coming?

Andrew suppressed his shock and retrieved the neatly-folded discount voucher from his pocket and exclaimed hurriedly, "I have it! I have the discount voucher! Mr. Lin gave it to me..."

He reached out and handed the voucher over. Upon verifying that it was the same voucher that Lin Jie had taken previously, she nodded. "So, one pearl milk tea, am I right?"

Andrew exhaled sharply and nodded vigorously. "That's right."

So it's like that!

Ahh, everything is all a part of Boss Lin's plan...

Andrew had been wondering why the philosopher's stone had to be delivered to Mr. Lin, but now he realized it was to complete S-277!

Chapter 264: Darkness Underneath The Light

Chapter 264: Darkness Underneath The Light

From the current look of things, though the whereabouts of the other two homunculi were unknown, S-277 already appeared just like a human and seemed to have established independent thinking and emotions.

As a homunculus, she was undoubtedly an unprecedented successful specimen!

The only problem was that the second batch of homunculi were still experimental mainly for the purpose of trial and error. The philosopher's stones used were only slightly better than low-grade, and therefore the physical capabilities and aether compatibility of these homunculi weren't up to mark.

Of course, this inadequacy wasn't relative. No matter how inferior the philosopher's stone, their aether compatibility was still far superior than most ordinary transcendent beings.

If a near-perfect philosopher's stone were to be used as a replacement... S-277 would no longer be a successful specimen but a perfect human being reborn instead!

The Clay Idol is about to be polished into a shiny gem.

Andrew couldn't help but sigh. As a scholar of the Truth Union as well as a participant and supervisor of the entire project, he couldn't help but feel a sense of pride.

Sure enough, only Mr. Lin is able to uncover an unremarkable, buried gem unseen by others.

If S-277, or rather, Mu'en, had remained in the laboratory, she would have more than likely been destroyed...

Andrew's scholar's heart was further filled with respect and appreciation toward Lin Jie. At the same time, his hatred toward his old, foolish self intensified. To think that he actually had the audacity to doubt the abilities of the bookstore owner in the past!

He found himself a spot and sat down. As he waited, he thought to himself, *Seems like... Mr. Lin had probably known everything already from that time.*

No, Andrew suddenly realized his own stupidity. *Is there anything that Mr. Lin doesn't know?*

He knows everything. Regardless of whether it was the Path of the Flaming Sword or anyone else.

Even if this organization itself was already like a ghost that didn't exist, extremely intimidating, and possessing formidable abilities while capable of infiltrating several organizations without being detected.

Having previously assumed that even though he wasn't yet at the peak but was surely one who could have a glimpse of the peak, Andrew only now realized that there were taller peaks lying in succession behind with powerful beasts hidden within, unbeknownst to all.

This was excessively frightening for someone like Andrew who had already reached a high position and wielded great power.

But when it came to Mr. Lin, nothing could escape his eyes. No matter how secretive the Path of the Flaming Sword was, they were but mere petty clowns to him.

Didn't that Supreme-rank, who had yet to reveal himself and was operating in secrecy, still present Mr. Lin with a gift?

That Supreme-rank had probably gotten wind of Mr. Lin's command and thus resorted to getting rid of Jerome and turning him into the philosopher's stone, which Andrew was tasked to bring back to the bookstore.

This was a division of labor and it couldn't be any clearer.

I would gulp down an entire batch of low-grade philosopher's stone if this isn't all planned out by Mr. Lin!

At this point, Andrew's stiffened up for a moment. He couldn't help but stare at Mu'en who was operating various machines to concoct pearl milk tea behind the counter. A sudden realization came over him as if a bell had suddenly been struck in his brain.

The Supreme-rank whose whereabouts... Unknown whereabouts?

No!

There is still a place!

The city within a city — Machine Loop!

The place where all the Truth Union's laboratories and factories were set up; where all their experiments with the inferior philosopher's stones and homunculus were conducted, and where S-277 was created.

During this period, even though the entire Truth Union had practically been combed through and anyone with the possibility of being a mole had been investigated, those moles had still managed to remain unidentified.

The initial plan was to continue waiting and bide time for an opportunity. However, Jerome's death had thrown a wrench into Andrew's plans, and if this mastermind had further schemes, surely someone would be sent as a replacement.

And that time would be when they seize the opportunity.

But Mu'en standing before him and the flitting flashbacks had knocked some sense into Andrew.

In fact, not all places owned by the Truth Union had been searched. Besides the general headquarters, there were still factories and laboratories within Machine Loop as well as some ruins within ruins that had been abandoned.

Machine Loop was located 'Underneath' Norzin's Central District

connecting the Upper District with the Lower District. The lowest point of this city within a city were the gates to the Lower District, which was heavily guarded with many layers of security which basically only employees of Rolle Resource Development had access to.

No one knew how much of the entire construct was usable because a great deal of area had been abandoned and sealed off. It was rumored that some dangerous experiments had been conducted in the past which turned the place into a wasteland where it was prohibited to step foot on.

Furthermore, Machine Loop had been constructed together with the rest of Norzin. The sole blueprint was said to have been laid to rest somewhere in Azir along with the great scholar, 'Ethereal Wisdom' Raziel.

Apart from Raziel, there probably wasn't any other person in the world that would know the complete layout of Machine Loop.

And this was exactly a place that would serve as a sanctuary for those operating in secrecy.

There's no one that knows the actual situation in those long sealed-off areas. We do not have the slightest clue whether they were still dangerous. Furthermore, these areas occupy a far greater space than the existing areas which are currently in use.

What if there are people hiding there?

Besides being used as a base of operations, the immense resources that were sealed off could be used as well without any worry of being found out.

That's right... It is the darkness underneath the light!

Andrew had a ghastly look on his face as beads of cold sweat formed on his forehead.

The large mass just beneath their noses had been neglected by them all this time. If someone had indeed taken over and occupied these sealed areas, it was a mind-numbing thought to imagine the years

that they had spent living together with the enemy, only separated by a wall.

“Here’s your pearl milk tea.”

A young girl’s voice broke Andrew’s train of thought as a glass of pearl milk tea was put before him.

“Hmm? Oh... Thank you.” Andrew gathered his thoughts, taking a deep breath as he carefully received the milk tea.

“Huu...” He exhaled sharply and raised his head, gathering his composure as he watched the back of Mu’en gradually moving further away.

Had it not been for seeing S-277 again after such a long time, he definitely wouldn’t have considered Machine Loop that quickly because it was a mental blind-spot.

Mr. Lin’s intention of having him come to the book cafe was to actually give him a prompt with regard to the enemy’s hiding spot and save him plenty of trouble.

It’s only to be expected of Mr. Lin!

Andrew’s gaze burned with a fervor as he took a sip of the pearl milk tea in his hand.

“Eh?”

He froze as the pearls seemed to have squirmed in his mouth.

Andrew glanced at the ‘pearls’ in his cup which were staring at him with wide-open eyes as countless thin tentacles extended out, bobbing up and down in the milk tea...

We are Hosted Novel, find us on google.

Chapter 265: Gulp

Chapter 265: Gulp

“!!!!!!”

Andrew’s eyes shuddered violently, but his body had stiffly gone rigid at that moment.

He suddenly recalled what he reckoned to be a misconception in the bookstore. Those distinct dark pearls in Lin Jie’s glass of pearl milk tea cup had looked just like eyeballs — That hadn’t been a misconception.

They were really eyeballs...

Just that instead of showing their hideous side, those unspecified little things were completely docile and cowered in their ‘pearl’ form in Boss Lin’s hands.

After which they became snacks chewed up and eaten by Boss Lin.

But at present, this glass of milk tea wasn’t in Boss Lin’s hands but Andrew’s.

Therefore, regardless of what was going through Andrew’s mind, no matter how absurd or chilling his thoughts were, those ‘pearls’ wouldn’t care.

They were floating freely in the milk tea, bobbing up and down, like a mass of wriggling seaweed with their tiny tentacles spreading out in the milk tea.

The opened eyes were a dull yellow, like that of a cat’s vertical pupil, murky with a confusing pattern as unpredictable as a myriad of runes.

With the sight of a Pandemonium-rank scholar, Andrew could even make out the strange structure of densely-packed barbs and suction cups clinging onto the transparent glass like clear fingerprints.

This image was imprinted in Andrew's mind and thoroughly shocked him.

But more frightening was the fact that Andrew had already taken a mouthful of this milk tea, and there was still a bit in his mouth...

This terror was basically the same experience as finding a worm inside after eating half an apple.

He now had about two 'pearls' in his mouth, and at that moment, they were climbing all over the roof of his mouth and his tongue. Tentacles like what he had just seen in the glass were using those barbs to anchor themselves and inching down his throat.

That's right, they were trying to climb in aggressively, as if wanting to make a home somewhere in the internal workings of his body.

Naturally, Andrew's face went white as his body instinctively fought against the intruding parties.

Although he was a physically weak scholar, he was also a transcendental being with the abilities of a Pandemonium-rank.

Alchemy was a very general, all-encompassing, and relatable discipline. In short, it could be described as a 'jack-of-all-trades' discipline, though having just a cursory understanding of it wasn't enough as it required a thorough grasp of many other disciplines.

Andrew's own body had received modifications before, and he had a stockpile of potions... If he wanted, using aether to crush these 'pearls' wouldn't be that difficult a task.

Even though he was unsure what these things were, he could basically tell that they were parasitic creatures that didn't have great individual strength and could even be considered weak.

But then, he halted.

Because he thought of Boss Lin's smile and the words that were said

"Don't forget to have a cup of pearl milk tea next door..."

“Limited to the first hundred cups, first come, first served.”

Boss Lin’s intention is for me to drink the milk tea! Is the first hundred discount some sort of screening mechanism? And are these ‘pearls’... an arrangement of Boss Lin’s?!

That’s right, Boss Lin having the milk tea in front of me is such an obvious hint...

I... I should...

Andrew’s entire body stiffened, pausing all movement to take in the pearl milk tea that was squirming wildly in his mouth. His gaze fell on Mu’en who was looking over the counter.

A confrontation was taking place between his mind and body, but the instinctive struggle was already minimal. A white halo gradually glowed in his eyes, making him abandon his struggling as a reverent and peaceful countenance came over him.

As if she hadn’t noticed the struggling customer staring at her, the teenage girl crouched down slightly before picking up a fat, white cat.

“Meow~”

The white cat appeared a little annoyed, wiggling its short little legs in the air. But, he eventually remembered that the very scary being had assigned him to be a mascot and watch the shop... He didn’t know what a mascot was, but he certainly had to do as he was told and help out.

Thus, Whitey twitched his ears and gave in reluctantly, allowing himself to be lifted upside down and shaken by Mu’en.

Plop plop plop...

A bunch of orange and yellow eyeballs were shaken out from the white fur and bounced on the counter a few times. A few of them weren’t able to hide their own ‘hairs’ and became puffed-up ‘sea urchins.’

The expressionless Mu'en calmly reached out and gathered those eyeballs.

She knew these things very well.

During the final battle at the Church of the Dome, the false god that Rodney had summoned inside the inner chamber had basically looked like this.

Just that these eyeballs were the shrunken chibi versions, and when they contracted into a ball in Mu'en's hands, they became 'pearls.' Those so-called pearls in the pearl milk tea were in fact these small pseudo-gods.

Incidentally, the main ingredient of 'Holy Moon Essence,' which had been found to control the clergy of the Church of the Dome, were these ground-up eyeballs that still retained their vitality even so.

When 'Holy Moon Essence' integrated into the body and cells of the victim, it could control their mind and thoughts.

As of now, these eyeballs could be considered the original, and whatever power they might have was evident.

Mu'en placed these 'pearls' into a cup and brewed... a glass of freshly made pearl milk tea.

These 'pearls' came from that?!

We are Hosted Novel, find us on google.

Andrew's eyes widened, the indictment of a consumer felt against an unscrupulous businessman filled up within him. At the same time, he sensed a familiar aura from the white cat.

Andrew had still been under disguised house arrest at the time of the Church of the Dome incident and hadn't been involved, so he didn't get to see the ghastly false god that was in the information reports.

What was familiar was that this was exactly the same aura he

remembered sensing at one point during his visit to the inner chamber.

At that time, the aura I sensed... was one of the three sacred artifacts enshrined on the altar... the Sleeping Moon Child.

Andrew stared at the white cat in flabbergast. *Does that mean... that this is the Sleeping Moon Child?? But it's clearly awake... That means that Boss Lin is personally cultivating a divine incarnate...*

And having it help to make pearl milk tea No, although Boss Lin says it is milk tea, these little things are to him select cronies... So he's using them to ensure loyalty.

Andrew couldn't help but gulp.

"Gulp."

And the 'pearls' were swallowed just like that...

Andrew looked as if he was constipated, pinching his neck before letting go and coughing.

Immediately afterwards, his expression lightened up as the last of his struggles changed into a calm tranquility.

Raising his glass of milk tea, Andrew gestured to Mu'en with a slight smile. "Excuse me, can I have a few extra portions of the milk tea to go? I think it's delicious and I would like to bring some back for my colleagues."

Chapter 266: Winning Over A Customers Heart

Chapter 266: Winning Over A Customer's Heart

“Thank you. I think my colleagues will really love this pearl milk tea since it's really good.”

Andrew smiled at Mu'en as he picked up the ten cups of pearl milk tea to go and turned to leave as a satisfied customer. These were bought at full price, of course.

He didn't feel any negative sentiments about swallowing these 'pearls' and reckoned that his resistance had been the instinctive reaction of his body. These sentiments of non-compliance were now all gone after consuming them.

These 'pearls' were that white cat, also a part of Sleeping Moon Child. Unlike 'Holy Moon Essence' which would alter a person's will, these whole clones wouldn't affect the host's thoughts.

But if the host had any intent of betrayal, they would instantly seize control of the host's brain.

This was a sort of fail-safe policy with a near-hundred-percent success rate, but it was only limited to transcendent beings below Destructive-rank.

Andrew reckoned that this would be very beneficial to the development and expansion of the 'Wisdom-Seekers.'

Their loyalty to the bookstore was guaranteed, but they couldn't guarantee the loyalty of others to themselves.

But these pearl milk teas could.

“If a newly established faction wants to grow stronger and survive in an organization many times more powerful than itself and

gradually take over from the inside, what is most important isn't the strength of its members but their absolute devotion."

Andrew muttered to himself as he left the cafe, gazing into the distance in the direction of the Truth Union.

Having already climbed to the position of Vice-Chairman, Andrew was well aware how recognizable the two words 'Truth Union' were to scholars.

Most members of the current 'Wisdom-Seekers' still didn't regard themselves as an independent organization but as a faction in the Truth Union, just like before when they were still 'Truth-Seekers.'

Their will was still in favor of the Truth Union.

The strength of the Truth Union meant that Hood didn't dare reveal his intentions to most members and could only influence them subtly. The number of members that had gone with him to the bookstore back then was just too little.

This way was much too slow...

"We need a more effective and steely means to strengthen the 'Wisdom-Seekers' to complement my current prestige and gain a proper foothold before the Truth Union has time to react!

"These ten cups of milk tea will be the beginning of a revolution!"

Andrew felt as if a fire was burning inside him, making him very excited.

Boss Lin had said to spread the word about the pearl milk tea.

This novel is available on Hosted Novel.

"Your will is received!"

Mu'en placed Whitey on a table and smoothened his fur.

Whitey wagged his tail in a blissfully relaxed manner and let out soft purrs as he laid down and tried to roll over... but he wasn't able to do so because of his size.

??? Whitey stared at the rolls on his chubby belly.

Mu'en squinted, then proceeded to prod Whitey's soft belly and help turn the fat cat over. Then, her eyes went to the silhouette of the leaving guest as she fell into thought.

Truth Union...

That was the place she was born. But in there, she was merely a doll, an object, a tool, and never had she felt the slightest bit of warmth. All that she knew was coldness.

Until that fierce fire shattered the cold tint.

And when she woke up again, she was greeted by the image of that man whose gentle smile seemed to glow.

He gave her a name as well as a true life.

Mu'en then resolved herself to do Lin Jie's bidding, but she had still been too weak in the past. Therefore, in accordance with Lin Jie's wishes, Mu'en would spend every night learning about the witches' power from Walpurgis. Then, she would kill the false god and regain power, becoming the new Moon goddess and the ruler of the night.

What Lin Jie depended on was her powers and authority.

Now, he wanted to make the Truth Union his plaything, and so Mu'en would do anything to help him achieve that.

She would become the moon that served justice.

But it would be his justice.

"We would need milk and tea leaves. A combination of the milk's richness and the flavor of tea leaves makes for an overwhelming deliciousness. At the same time... Haha... if you add some other

additives, no one will notice."

Lin Jie's words on teaching her how to make milk tea was still fresh in her mind. He had seemed like a sly businessman then, winking at her with a crafty smile.

"And the most important is the pearls... Oh, but there, there doesn't seem to be any raw material here. Tsk. That's a real bother, but we should be able to find a substitute, eh?"

Lin Jie had then given his always capable assistant an expectant look.

"Think, Mu'en. Is there anything that could be made into little black balls? Hmm... They should be round, chewy, spongy, and maybe a little bit sticky too. Oh, and it's got to be addictive."

"What's wrong with you, Whitey? Why are you shaking so badly? Let me take a look. It can't be heatstroke, can it?"

"Such a beautiful little cat must certainly taste good... Everything's fine now? How strange."

"Oh... there is? Very well then, let's do it according to you. Let me have a check once you've made it."

"These are the keys to grasp a customer's heart. As the saying goes, you have to first win over a customer's stomach if you want to win over their heart..."

Mu'en stretched out her slender fingers and played with Whitey's hair. The corners of her mouth curved upward ever so slightly. She gently pinched a 'pearl' in her hand, and one pearl seemingly multiplied and became two.

I believe... he's very happy too.

Lin Jie was wondering how much a ruby this large was worth.

He surveyed the shiny red gem nearly as large in his palm, fiddling

it very carefully as if he were actually holding a few million dollars.

It actually felt pleasing.

Although this was said to be a philosopher's stone, Lin Jie had no use of it. For the sake of it, he had secretly tested if this gem could turn ordinary metal into gold when there wasn't anyone in the shop. The outcome, though, was very disappointing.

What philosopher's stone?! It's just a fake!

What use does it have if it can't turn anything into gold?!

Lin Jie had no desire for other legendary functions it supposedly had, such as immortality or resurrection.

After much consideration, the greatest value was to sell it as an ordinary gem for money.

But because business at the book cafe had picked up, Lin Jie wasn't as poor as before and even felt like he had made a surplus. Selling such a big rare item seemed much too wasteful.

"Why not give it to Mu'en!" A sudden thought flashed across Lin Jie's mind. "Mu'en managed to come up with the pearl milk tea and ought to be rewarded. She will probably like shiny things like this since she's a girl."

The more Lin Jie thought about it, the more feasible this felt. "With a little packaging, this would be the most appropriate gift," exclaimed the gleeful Lin Jie.

Chapter 267: Y-Young M-M-Miss

Chapter 267: Y-Young M-M-Miss

“This book ca... It’s called a book cafe, right? A combination of a bookstore and a cafe; just like the advert mentioned. The cafe’s business seems to be booming,” mused Theodore enviously to himself as he eyed the building across the road.

He could see that the entire cafe was packed. There were some people reading books quietly, while others engaged in lively conversations. On top of that, a noticeably unique beverage could be seen on almost every table in the book cafe.

All of the patrons had peaceful smiles on their faces, and the atmosphere appeared serene and jubilant.

It was said that the book cafe had invented a one-of-a-kind beverage, aptly named ‘pearl milk tea.’ Its initial launch attracted such a large batch of customers that it ran out of stock. Many customers who came far and wide were unable to get their hands on one.

However, higher demand only increases the product’s worth. Its popularity became further widespread from those who didn’t get to try this novel beverage. Those few that actually managed to taste the drink were largely vocal in their affirmation of the sumptuousness of this ‘pearl milk tea.’

This only added to the curiosity for the drink.

“It’s so good that it’s a little strange,” Theodore uttered while staring at the bobbing heads in the cafe.

Throwing a cigarette butt to the ground, Manan stomped it out with the sole tip of his leather shoes. “What’s so strange about it?” he asked as he tightened his jacket.

He raised his thumb and pointed at the rows of constructed infrastructure behind him.

“This area’s gonna be way livelier in future because of the influence of our Rolle Resource’s development.”

Manan spoke with pride; he was the person in charge of this operation and had been personally delegated this task by Young Miss Ji herself.

He was a Northern-er with the typical physical traits of one: raven-black hair and hazel eyes that seemed to lack dimension. Hence, he decided to grow out beard to look less conspicuous to a certain extent.

He had been with Ji Bonong for quite some time already, though he still couldn’t be considered as a true confidant. Nevertheless, he was still a capable man, and operations of great importance were specifically placed under his supervision.

Thus, from his point of view, even though this place seemed rather deserted, it was actually brimming with potential.

And that book cafe was solid evidence that proved this point.

And Theodore beside him was just yet another insignificant merchant who’d come today to inquire about the shop-house rental prices.

He’d only took note of his competitor because he was a relatively reputable second-hand book merchant.

Theodore shook his head. “Perhaps I am being overly presumptuous, but it feels as if the patrons don’t seem to be reading. Rather, it appears like...”

He hesitated, as if trying to think of the specific verb. “Like they are praying... Haha, my imagination is running far too wild.”

Theodore couldn’t help chuckling as he said it. Even he found his own words ridiculous.

This was a book cafe and not some church, how could there be a prayer session ongoing in there? If it was really prayer, then would they be worshipping some God of Milk Tea?

Manan laughed as well before chiming in, “This book cafe has an engaging way of operation; perhaps you can learn a thing or two from it. Bona-fide bookstores aren’t that popular nowadays, after all. I heard that business isn’t going so well for you recently. You’d better not end up like that bookstore, for we won’t entertain any refunds.”

He pointed in half-jest at the dilapidated bookstore beside the cafe.

Search Hosted Novel for the original.

Theodore’s gaze also shifted in that direction. He had noticed the bookstore without a signboard from the beginning, and the only visitor to the bookstore left empty-handed and with a heavy heart. That very same person had then entered the adjacent book cafe to purchase a drink before leaving in satisfaction.

It could be deduced from this that the bookstore’s business was really bad.

“Of course not. Despite my failing business in the book industry, I still have some loyal customers. Moreover... I’ve prepared a few antique books from my personal collection to be sold. I believe aristocrats and scholars would be highly interested in them.”

He smiled, appearing composed on the outside, but he did feel a sharp pang of sadness deep down.

Just as Manan had said, bookstores were already becoming a thing of the past. Ever since the computer saw widespread usage, reading from the screen had gradually gained popularity. Perhaps in time to come, people would abandon books altogether.

But till then, he was still willing to be a bookseller.

“That’s good to hear then,” Manan said with a pat on Theodore’s shoulder. “Once the contract has been signed, Unit 16 on the first floor will be your shop. Rolle Resource Development will begin

promoting this commercial district when it opens. Good luck.”

The overall allocation as well as terms and benefits had actually already been discussed, so this was only small talk.

Theodore gave a sincere smile, feeling secretly relieved inside.

He had recently acquired some rather special books that caught the eye of others and made him a target. Thus, he was forced to give up on his original store and switch to being under Rolle Resource Development.

Hopefully this would intimidate those people...

Since the collaboration was a pleasant success, the overall mood naturally lightened up.

Manan lit another cigarette and took a long drag. With a cryptic smile, he said, “Actually, I’ve heard some rumors of the young miss visiting this particular bookstore. Rumors have it that the bookstore owner knows magic and is capable of many miraculous feats... although I reckon it’s all mumbo-jumbo.”

Theodore was slightly surprised. *I never expected the person in charge would be so gossipy...*

Shaking his head, he replied, “Perhaps it was to create an opinion to attract more customers... This strategy is pretty common. Though resorting to such lengths probably means this bookstore is on its last legs.”

Moreover, this is way too far-fetched. Not mentioning magic powers, why would the young heiress of Rolle Resource Development visit a place like this in the first place?

Manan chortled. “That’s true, how could that be possible? Ha-ha-ha... hic ugh cough!”

Halfway through his laughing, he suddenly appeared as if he was choking; mouth wide open, red-faced, and having a pained expression.

Theodore was startled and immediately reached out to support Manan. However, he couldn't help glancing in the same direction when he noticed Manan's un-moving stare.

Parked in front of the shabby door of the bookstore was a high-end jet-black vehicle.

An eerie and foreboding sense of premonition came over Theodore.

Manan finally composed himself by taking a breath. He could only stare wide-eyed at the person who alighted from the vehicle. His brain seemed to be short-circuiting as he exclaimed in disbelief, "Y-Young M-M-Miss?!"

Lin Jie was currently wondering the best way to wrap the philosopher's stone as a gift for his very capable assistant.

However, he was interrupted by a luxuriant black limousine that stopped outside his bookstore.

The middle-aged chauffeur in a neat black suit was the first to alight. He made his way to the back and opened the car door. Bending slightly, he kept a stable posture, placing one hand on the top of the door frame to protect the passenger's head while his other hand gestured 'please.'

Ji Zhixiu's slender and fair legs were the first to touch the ground. Black high heels adorned her delicate ankles, and donned on her elegant figure was a dress of the same coloration. Complementing her graceful facial features were two red prism earrings on either side of her cheeks.

She took a deep breath as she saw the worn-down bookstore.

In the meantime, the chauffeur had already made his way to the trunk and had lugged out a cumbersome suitcase.

Chapter 268: Asserting His Dominance

Chapter 268: Asserting His Dominance

Ji Zhixiu alighted from the limousine and made her way toward the bookstore.

Her chauffeur, still carrying the large suitcase, walked over to Ji Zhixiu and he supported her with a white-gloved hand like a dutiful servant.

The initial shock of Manan watching from the distance began to ease slowly. He scratched his chin and couldn't help wondering, *I don't recall ever seeing a chauffeur or servant like this one accompanying Young Miss Ji? Could he be newly hired?*

Beside him, Theodore was somewhat in a daze as well.

The young miss of the Ji Family really does visit this bookstore...

And from the looks of it, this isn't a normal stopover. She even bought a gift, and the weight of that suitcase means that it absolutely isn't just money.

At Rolle Resource Development's level, money isn't of great importance. More often than not, rare and priceless objects are used as gifts instead.

In other words, Young Miss Ji must regard this visit with great importance.

Even though this young miss allegedly doesn't participate much in the Rolle Resource Development matters, she's still the only daughter of Ji Bonong after all.

Even if that ridiculous rumor isn't true, I'm afraid this bookstore is more than it seems....

Theodore hesitated for a bit. *Should I find a time to visit once my store*

is relocated?

Since that place is also a bookseller, perhaps I can find a better way to get rid of the book I acquired...

He shook his head at that thought. For now, that would remain his last resort.

Those people after him weren't simple and had an unknown and problematic power backing them. Also, offhandedly throwing others under the bus was against Theodore's own moral code. He would hide behind the reputation of Rolle Resource Development for now. After all, he did pay quite a sum to obtain this store unit.

But then again...

Theodore watched the master and servant across the road in admiration. Even the chauffeur had proper bearings, as to be expected of someone in Rolle Resource Development's employ.

At the door of the bookstore.

Tilting her head slightly and seeing the middle-aged chauffeur closely tailing her made Ji Zhixiu break into a grin and she could barely hold back her laughter.

The chauffeur seemed calm, but there in fact was a hint of helplessness in his eyes. On closer observation, one would find his movement to be unnaturally stiff. Even if his actions were systematic and he made no mistakes, he seemed to lack proficiency, as if he were still a trainee.

Sigh...

He sighed inwardly.

Becoming a chauffeur and servant for his own daughter was nothing to be ashamed of.

Back when Ji Zhixiu was younger, he even pretended to be a horse for his innocent little daughter to ride on...

Indeed, this suited-up middle-aged chauffeur was the head of Rolle Resource Development. The reputable and mighty Mr. Ji Bonong.

In order to avoid any unnecessary attention for this visit to the bookstore owner, he had even altered his appearance by changing how others perceived him. Using the Hermit's Ring, he 'transformed' into an ordinary chauffeur and accompanied Ji Zhixiu on this trip.

Additionally, he utilized a tool from the secret chamber called 'Mirror Mimic' to synthesize a doppelganger of himself to remain at A16 Manor.

'Mirror Mimic' was just an empty husk of flesh and blood, but if it were to fall into the hands of a magician proficient in curses, its usage could be further amplified.

However, Ji Bonong was at best just an ordinary person who could vaguely sense the presence of aether. He had attempted to become a transcendent being before, but unfortunately, he lacked the talent to do so.

Even when giving his all, he could only slightly shift a meager amount of surrounding aether.

Hence, in order for him to split his consciousness and control the mimic, he had to rely on a series of sigils he had gotten from a white magician, and the entire process was a complex and arduous one.

Luckily for him, this set of operations had already been prepared ages ago, so it wasn't that difficult to implement it.

Having used so much of my blood, sweat, and tears alongside many years of preparation, I finally got the chance to use it today. This makes it all worth it in the end, mused Ji Bonong silently.

He looked up and surveyed the storefront that he had only seen in photographs, as well as being mentioned repeatedly by his daughter.

Despite it being decrepit, Ji Bonong didn't know whether he was

imagining it, but permeating from the shrouded depths of rows of bookshelves behind those hazy cabinet windows was a mysterious aura, enticing all to explore it.

His daughter glanced back at him, hand already on the doorknob.

Ji Bonong gave a nod. He hadn't been this nervous for quite a long time.

Creakk...

Jingle~

Ji Zhixiu gently opened the door, and the bell chimed.

"Welcome—Oh, Miss Ji, it's been a while, what brings you here today?"

"Are you here with a present as well? I'll have to say beforehand that I don't accept gifts that are too extravagant..."

A young man's warm, amicable voice reverberated from the back of the store, sounding as if he was jesting with someone he was well acquainted with.

Ji Bonong's heart sank and his eyelids twitched.

Though he had long known about the 'omniscience' of the bookstore owner, Lin Jie, he still felt intimidated when meeting him face-to-face.

But, Ji Bonong had already prepared himself. It wasn't out of the realm of possibility for the bookstore owner to have a premonition of their philanthropic visitation, and it certainly wasn't grounds for agitation.

What truly made Ji Bonong's heart drop was the sentence: "I don't accept gifts that are too extravagant."

This form of phrasing was essentially a rejection!

Ji Zhixiu also halted in her tracks for a moment but quickly

recovered and flashed a confident smile. “It has indeed been quite a while, Boss Lin. I came here bearing a gift, but I’m mainly here with a request...”

In all his years managing Rolle Resource Development, Ji Bonong had never felt as grim as he did now.

Trudging heavily, he still had to reluctantly turn his head toward the direction of the voice.

He was met with the sight of a young dark-haired man looking back at them, chuckling as he toyed with a red gem in his hand. There was a sparkle in his jet-black eyes, which complemented his graceful and scholastic bearing.

This was the same terrifying person who had reconfigured an entire Hunter’s organization starting from a betrayal. The very same man who instilled fear into both the Truth Union and Secret Rite Tower, and the one who single-handedly orchestrated the fall of the Church of the Dome and the rise of the Sun’s Faith. This was the man that had brewed a storm of death and blood in the transcendent world.

His gentle appearance, resembling that of an ordinary man, didn’t quite fit his gruesome and merciless atrocities. The jovial smile on his face made it seem like he had nothing but delight at being reunited with an old friend.

Yet when opened his mouth once more, he immediately asserted his dominance.

“I think I saw a car parked outside the store.”

Lin Jie straightened his posture and turned to look at Ji Bonong with a raised eyebrow and lamented, “This must be your chauffeur? The lives of the affluent are really something, it really makes people envious...”

“...”

Ji Bonong absolutely refused to believe the bookstore owner couldn’t see through his Hermit’s Ring illusion.

Support us at [Hosted Novel](#).

This meant that there was only one other possibility—this was a warning!

The bookstore owner was implying one thing: in his bookstore, the head of Rolle Resource Development was no different from a chauffeur standing in his bookstore!

Chapter 269: A Test

Chapter 269: A Test

Although they had already anticipated what could happen, the worst case scenario had still occurred in the end...

Both Ji Bonong and Ji Zhixiu were dejected.

From the beginning, Ji Bonong was very clear that they were taking a tremendous gamble. All of their chips were placed in this bet and everything would be gone if they lost.

At present, this particular bet was hinged on two stakes.

The first was that the bookstore owner possessed enough power to intimidate and perhaps instill fear into any transcendent being seeking to control Rolle Resource Development.

If the Ji clan were to receive the support of the bookstore, they would be able to truly distance themselves from the common masses. Only then could they become a new transcendent organization and not the puppet of transcendent beings.

The risks weren't too high, as Ji Zhixiu had already proven it herself.

In truth, as an ordinary person, Ji Bonong could only rely on his daughter to accurately gauge the power level of those particularly powerful transcendent beings.

Though no evidence was found, Ji Bonong still firmly believed the initial betrayal incident within White Wolf had the influence of those transcendent beings.

They wanted to use that opportunity to eliminate Ji Zhixiu and prevent her from getting a foothold in the realm of transcendent domain. Even though she wouldn't have lost her life back then, if this accidental incident hadn't occurred, Ji Zhixiu would've still

undoubtedly been unable to continue on in the hunter organization.

However, due to a stroke of fate, Ji Zhixiu became a patron of the bookstore and was now a hunter nearing Destructive-rank as well as leader of a reasonably powerful hunter organization.

Despite this, the transcendent powers that had always been controlling Rolle Resource Development from the shadows could still easily take action to bring her down, yet they no longer made any moves against Ji Zhixiu.

This was proof that the bookstore's power was capable of instilling fear into those transcendent beings.

The second stake would be the bookstore owner's temperament.

This was the more crucial between the two and also the key to deciding the outcome.

Deep down, Ji Bonong knew that whatever they were currently attempting—initiating a deal with the omniscient Supreme-rank with a calculated and deliberate approach—was no different from playing with fire.

They were basically taking advantage of the other party.

With most high-ranked transcendental beings having drastically prideful personalities, the majority would be outraged if they were to discover themselves being duped, and that would only be the beginning.

The consequences would be dire if a Supreme-rank were to be enraged.

From the intelligence gathered, this 'great Supreme-rank' never showed a shred of mercy toward offenders, often eradicating those that crossed him.

However, he was very amiable toward his patrons. He would even forgive their past offenses; at least to a certain extent.

A prime example would be Joseph, who'd actually visited the

bookstore with a hostile intention when he caught wind of Wilde's extended stay in the bookstore.

But that could fundamentally be owed to his ignorance of the bookstore owner's power.

The ignorant were innocent and hence could be spared.

Even so, Lin Jie still dished out a minor punishment: by making sure his patron understood what he was truly facing.

In fact, it could be said that people like them, who were blatantly exploiting the bookstore for their self-gain, were testing deep waters and could even be labeled as offenders already.

The moment they lost this bet, whatever contingency plans these transcendental beings had didn't matter, for they would need to first face the wrath of the bookstore owner personally.

And this wrath... wasn't something that couldn't even hope to endure through.

Ji Bonong already had a few scenarios in mind. If they were unsuccessful in persuading Lin Jie, the worst that could happen... would probably just be losing their lives. Ji Bonong had already arrived with the notion of death in mind, but he was still just an ordinary person. Already advanced in age, worries and doubt were just part and parcel of his life.

His only hope was for Ji Zhixiu to be alright.

Fortunately, she was a patron of the bookstore, and the bookstore owner had always treated his patrons with goodwill.

However, he hadn't expected that things had already concluded before it could begin...

"I don't accept extravagant gifts that are too extravagant." The bookstore owner had said so himself.

All of the ancient artifacts they had recovered from the underground—objects which could be said to be of the highest

value of them all—had been declined!

After which, the bookstore owner had even compared the status of the head of Rolle Resource Development to that of a chauffeur. Whatever sliver of Ji Bonong's pride as a mortal competing against transcendents was thrown straight into the mud.

All of his hopes were dashed. This bet seemed like a thorough failure already.

Ji Bonong's face was rigid and pale as a sheet. He could barely hold himself together despite mustering all his willpower, yet his arms still trembled uncontrollably.

Ji Zhixiu took a deep breath. She was also spontaneously shaken.

However, she had been interacting with the bookstore for a longer time and hence could still find a silver lining hidden within Lin Jie's words.

It seems that our actions have offended Mr. Lin... Judging from how he usually treats his patron, his last sentence can be considered as mockery... He is really angry.

But he still greeted me as per usual; this meant he still sees me as a patron. That means that things aren't as bad as they seem. We still stand a chance.

It's just that he was offended by our self-assertive behavior, especially since father is only an ordinary mortal... Hence he's warning us that the tricks of the 'rich' and 'businessmen' do not belong here.

Ji Zhixiu couldn't help but to sigh. *To him, Rolle Resource Development is just another ordinary business no different from any other.*

No, wait a minute, this sentence isn't the key point; what's important are the words he said before that.

Ji Zhixiu muttered to herself silently, "I don't accept gifts that are too extravagant, too extravagant..."

Her eyes lit up instantly. *This doesn't equate to rejection!*

Even though these ancient artifacts were priceless to them and probably everyone else in the world, these objects were probably of 'inferior value' to the exalted existence of the bookstore owner.

These words had been said from Mr. Lin's point of view, hence it wasn't right to consider it from their own point of view... They had mistaken this for rejection when it was the direct opposite.

It was just a test set in the midst of his drubbing!

And if they had chosen to retreat, it would've equated to them failing the test.

At which point the bookstore owner would have an appropriate reason to refuse.

But only by choosing to meet the challenge head on would they truly understand Mr. Lin's motivations.

Search Hosted Novel for the original.

A selfish pursuit of self-interest was ill-advised. As beneficiaries of the bookstore, they ought to always implement Mr. Lin's point of view to assess every situation.

Everything and anything should be done in the best interests of the bookstore so as to contribute and become servants of the bookstore.

Only this way will they be qualified to have their wishes fulfilled by the bookstore!

Ji Zhixiu glanced at Ji Bonong, using her eyes to signal her father to remain calm. She then proceeded to firmly plant herself on the stool before the counter. "Don't worry, Mr. Lin, we didn't bring anything too extravagant, just some minor offerings."

The corner of Lin Jie's lips twitched. *I was just being polite... You are a young heiress; you can't just be giving me some local specialties just like Old Wilde, can you?*

Probably not.... Right? You are the young Miss of Rolle Resource Development for God's sake!

While he had on a smile, deep down, Lin Jie was already regretting his choice of words.

Why did I have to say that?

Chapter 270: Isn't That Funny?

Chapter 270: Isn't That Funny?

[? Previous Chapter](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[Next Chapter \(Teaser\) ?](#)

At this point, it was too embarrassing to take back what he had just said.

But deep down, Lin Jie felt that the young heiress of Rolle Resource Development, Ji Zhixiu, would never really give anything worthless, as that wouldn't be in line with her status.

"We didn't bring anything too extravagant" is surely a modest understatement. Surely.

Sigh, talking to these upper-class people is just tiring, having to wonder from time to time whether they are telling the truth or just being polite.

Mr. Lin himself had completely forgotten that he, too, had been speaking pleasantries just a while earlier.

In any case, Ji Zhixiu had really brought a gift... He had only been joking and never expected his words would hit the nail on the head.

These two are really... So considerate!

Lin Jie's gaze fell on the large suitcase held by the chauffeur. *Is that the gift? It looks heavy. It isn't a box of money, is it?!*

...Never mind, forget about it. Best not to have any expectations.

Lin Jie recalled the time he had opened Cherry's box with eager anticipation only to be met with a mere fossilized heart.

He didn't want to experience that roller coaster ride of emotions a

second time.

Find the original at Hosted Novel.

Across him, Ji Zhixiu had already opened the suitcase.

Click.

The latch of the suitcase clicked opened, revealing all its contents. A dazzling glimmer from within caught his eyes at once.

Lin Jie's attention was immediately attracted to it and he was momentarily stunned. He felt as if he were an actor in a low-budget indie movie and a glimmering golden ray had just shot up into the sky before him... Of course, this was a slight exaggeration.

However, the objects in the box were really eye-catching, like the special effects one would see in cartoons when opening a chest full of treasure.

The rich calling it 'not too extravagant' was indeed just them showing off!

Most of the things in the suitcase seemed really valuable: an emerald crown, a necklace of silver pearls, lifelike statues of persons, a curved dagger embedded with gems, and most conspicuous of all was an apple of pure gold!

Pure gold!

Such a big one!

Lin Jie tried his best to restrain the corners of his lips from inching upward so that he wouldn't seem like a superficial man whose eyes would widen at the sight of money.

He had to abide by what he had said after all. If he appeared in a bad light, his life mentor persona would just come crumbling down.

It's no wonder she's the young miss of Rolle Resource Development. How generous!

Please bring me more of such things that aren't too 'extravagant'!

My few sessions with her haven't been in vain! From the first time we met three months ago, I've duped... ahem, taught her life lessons. Now, finally, my teachings have finally blossomed and are bearing fruit.

And she's given me so much at once!

The slightly uneasy Ji Zhixiu asked cautiously, "These... are my gifts. What do you think of them?"

Lin Jie gave a slight smile. "I think... Mm, it's not bad, but it's still a little too expensive for me, is it really all right to give them to me?"

Ji Zhixiu was even more perturbed. She somehow felt that Boss Lin's smile was a little too brilliant as if it was hiding something else.

This sentence was definitely a test of her determination!

"No, no, no, it isn't expensive at all. These gifts are really insignificant compared to the help you have given me in the past. If you are willing to accept them, that would be the greatest affirmation for me."

Ji Zhixiu's eyes were full of pleading.

Lin Jie was in a tough spot.

While he was really just a kind soul who liked to help others without expecting anything in return, this customer was so insistent on giving him something 'not too extravagant,' so he had to reluctantly accept it.

"In that case..."

The young man across the counter sighed, and Ji Zhixiu's spirits lifted right away. Then, she heard his reply. "Very well, it's not the gift but the thought that counts. I'll accept these gifts."

Ji Zhixiu froze for an instant as she felt a shudder within her heart. She clenched her fists tightly as her body trembled, trying her best

not to lose her composure.

He accepted!

In other words, he agreed!

The fate of Rolle Resource Development, so to speak, had been completely turned around at this very moment!

She took a deep breath to calm herself, then said in a trembling voice, “Your appreciation of these gifts is a great honor for Rolle Resource Development...”

“Even though it isn’t too extravagant, I quite like them. I appreciate your kindness.” With a straight face, Lin Jie reached out of the golden apple. But midway through, he paused and remembered that such an action would reveal his real inner thoughts.

No, no, no.

He scanned the rest of the suitcase and saw an unremarkable fragment of stone.

What’s this?

An object like this seemed to be of no value when in the middle of a heap of treasure. However, there appeared to be some strange runes on it. Given Lin Jie’s experience, he reckoned that it was probably some ancient object discovered in an archaeological excavation.

Could she have brought me something similar because she heard that Cherry had given me an ancient fossil?

But whatever... That’s a great ‘cover-up’ to use.

Lin Jie switched to picking out the stone fragment instead and said earnestly, “Sometimes, the worth of an item doesn’t depend on whether it looks expensive or not but on its additional value.

“People are also the same; one’s birth doesn’t determine one’s destiny. Only you can control your future. It’s better to depend on yourself rather than rely on others.”

While it was put across in this manner, most people had a tendency to fall for reverse psychology.

Just like if a fortune-teller came and proclaimed, “There’s a shadow on your forehead and you won’t have long to live. I have medicine here that can ward off disaster and tide you over calamity...” Any logical person would immediately stay far away from this sham.

But, if the fortune-teller turned away and muttered, “With a life like this, sigh. There’s no hope, no hope indeed...”, there was a possibility that one would chase after him and beg for help.

What Lin Jie had said was similar to the latter. What he had said was for Ji Zhixiu to rely on herself to save herself. But if she really had a way, would she have come over seeking him that anxiously?

Therefore, this so-called ‘duping’ was to maintain a distance from them while keeping them half-hanging...

Ji Zhixiu nodded hurriedly and grimaced. “I understand. This request is indeed out of line, but I’m willing to pay any price...”

As she spoke, Ji Zhixiu’s eyes were on the stone fragment in Lin Jie’s hand. She couldn’t help but lament deep down. *It’s only expected from Boss Lin... From a single glance, he’s able to pinpoint the most valuable object with the highest mysticism of them all.*

Lin Jie felt that Ji Zhixiu’s expression was a little strange. He had only taken the stone, but why was she staring as if he had taken the golden apple?

But then, he looked down and came to a realization. *Oh, right, I’m still holding the ruby that was given by Andrew.*

“Well, whatever the price is doesn’t matter. You aren’t an outsider after all.” With a smile, Lin Jie picked up the ruby and waved it. “That Andrew from before came to make amends, which meant giving me a small clock handicraft and this ruby.”

He then changed the subject. “Do you know Jerome?”

Ji Zhixiu paused for a moment before answering, “Yes, a deputy

head of department at the Truth Union, who recently died...”

Lin Jie grinned. “Yes, and Andrew named this ruby Jerome. Isn’t that funny?”

Chapter 271: Blackie Whom He Hadn't Seen For A Long Time

Chapter 271: Blackie Whom He Hadn't Seen For A Long Time

[? Previous Chapter](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[Next Chapter \(Teaser\) ?](#)

Andrew named this ruby... Jerome.

Ji Zhixiu's breath was taken away as chill surged up her spine, and her body instinctively tensed up.

Fear seemed to tightly grip her heart as she gazed at the red gem in Boss Lin's hand.

As if fog was clearing, some details that she hadn't noticed prior suddenly became clear.

That red gem was actually an extremely pure philosopher's stone that contained a massive amount of aetheric energy within. But because it was still too fresh, a faint scent of blood and life force still lingered.

Then, an even more terrifying realization sprang upon her—

That philosopher's stone is Jerome!

With great difficulty, she turned to look at her father, who met her gaze stiffly. Ji Bonong's face was white as a sheet, and he didn't even dare to wipe the cold beads of sweat that had formed on his forehead. Fear and helplessness were clearly showing in his eyes.

Even though he was just an ordinary person, he knew about the world of transcendent beings far better than most transcendent beings themselves. He was no fool either and of course immediately

grasped what the owner had implied.

While he had said, “whatever the price is doesn’t matter,” in the next moment, he had very casually pointed out that the gem he was toying with was in fact a human life...

Clearly, the bookstore owner was trying to imply that *“What you see is the price you will pay should you fail to satisfy me.”*

What an incomparably terrifying existence! He’s not just powerful; even his words alone can create such a formless yet pressurizing might...

Ji Bonong vaguely got the same feeling as when he had seen those men of the Central District who truly controlled Norzin.

This was different from facing higher-rank transcendent beings.

He had interacted with many transcendent beings, and most of them would directly unleash their aura and use the most straightforward power to intimidate ordinary mortals like him.

This was the law of the jungle. The instinctive shudder and fear would directly destroy a person’s sanity and dignity. Without a doubt, this was a very efficient way to bring people to their knees.

However, none had been like the one before him now. There wasn’t any aura of a transcendent he gave off, yet every word he said was like a devil’s whisper; an invisible tentacle, tightly gripping every inch of one’s psychological thoughts, making one suffocate from fear.

A mere few words could shatter their psychological defenses.

When the terrible truth was revealed, Ji Bonong stared in horror at the red gem as if he saw a twisted, skinless corpse squirming inside.

Its internal organs and bones were forced to curl up within, struggling to twist into muddy flesh as it tried to let out a silent and terrified wail to the outside world...

Ji Zhixiu coolly turned her head back and felt that her father had probably lost his mind. He had become muddled all of a sudden, as

if his soul had left.

This was the real warning!

In the face of a higher-level of mysticism, the protective ability of the Hermit's Ring was nullified.

Now wasn't the time to act rashly. If they could get out of this safely, Ji Bonong would surely be fine.

The corners of Ji Zhixiu's lips curled into a stiff smile. "It's funny, very funny, how can a person turn into a gem? That's quite a good joke..."

"Right?" Lin Jie sighed. "But this Jerome really had it coming."

A monopoly the size of Rolle Resource Development would surely be more well-informed than the owner of a small bookstore.

All sorts of organizations would probably be immediately informed about the death of a Deputy Head from the Truth Union the moment it was discovered.

Judging from the reaction and answer of Ji Zhixiu, Lin Jie was certain that was the case.

Explaining it wouldn't take too much effort, then...

Thus, after removing some transcendent elements from the previous conversation he had with Andrew, Lin Jie recounted the story to Ji Zhixiu with a gossipy mindset.

At the same time, he also criticized the scumbag Jerome's actions and expressed deep sympathy for Prima, the young lady who was now working at the next-door book cafe.

At the same time, he repeated his evaluation about Andrew's sense of humor and asked, "Don't you think he's especially humorous too? Claiming that the ruby was Jerome's repayment when I only requested him to bring Jerome in to discuss compensation for the door..."

“Compensation for... the door?”

A stunned Ji Zhixiu turned to look at the bookstore’s wooden door.

It still appeared barely intact, but there were indeed visible signs of repair.

Lin Jie was miffed just thinking about it and explained, “I had Mu’en help repair the door, but back then, there was a big hole in the door because of Jerome.”

Lin Jie spread his arms to show how big the hole had been and complained, “A hole this big... How much money did you think was wrongfully spent to repair it?! Tell me, don’t you think he ought to compensate me?”

Ji Zhixiu nodded. “He should.”

So, this was how Jerome offended Boss Lin. That’s exactly what he deserves...

Lin Jie sighed. “But he’s already dead, so I can only pay for it myself... Oh, sorry for ranting about something so useless. What’s the request you said you wanted to make?”

Ji Zhixiu perked herself up and put on a resolute expression. The most critical moment had finally arrived.

It seemed that Mr. Lin was quite satisfied with how they acted. He wouldn’t have asked this question otherwise.

She took a deep breath and said earnestly, “On behalf of Rolle Resource Development Company, we would like to obtain authorization from you to be a business of your bookstore, to market and sell books for you within your permission.”

Lin Jie was caught off guard. He vaguely remembered ever sending out feelers about this when she visited him some time ago. However, Ji Zhixiu wasn’t able to represent Rolle Resources at that time, so Lin Jie hadn’t gone into depth regarding this.

Having Rolle Resource Development distribute books... was

definitely a good thing.

Lin Jie's constant worry about his lack of customers could instantly be fixed immediately and he might never be short of money again.

But at the same time, it would be much less fun for him because his favorite pastime was talking to these strange customers of his, teaching them life lessons, and helping them solve problems in the name of selling books.

There was also one other factor that had to be taken into account—

Not all the books on his bookshelves could be sold.

Due to the huge cultural and geographical difference between the two worlds, some content might not be understood by the people here, which could definitely be an issue.

Find the original at Hosted Novel.

To solve this, Lin Jie would need to check them through manual screening all by himself and then select which of the books to sell.

This was a very troublesome thing.

While hesitating, he suddenly saw the shadow inside the half-opened leather suitcase suddenly 'come alive' and morphed into an indeterminable shape, as if a hand had suddenly covered the golden apple in the suitcase.

Blackie!

Lin Jie blinked several times as his intuition told him that it was Blackie whom he hadn't seen for a long time.

Chapter 272: One More Thing

Chapter 272: One More Thing

[? Previous Chapter](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[Next Chapter \(Teaser\) ?](#)

Lin Jie was rather surprised to see that ‘hand’ reaching out from within the darkness of the suitcase.

It has been a few months since he had last seen Blackie.

Blackie always had the tendency to disappear. Lin Jie had gotten accustomed to it as well and thus assumed that Blackie had gone back to his state of hiding after helping him previously.

However, he hadn’t expected Blackie to reappear once again.

And from the look of things, it was because of...

Lowering his gaze, Lin Jie eyed the dazzling golden apple laid on the table and his lips twitched. *Blackie came back for an apple?*

Moreover, can this golden apple even be consumed?!

Even though the apple itself was abnormal, the same could be said about the one wanting to consume it.

With this reasoning in mind, Lin Jie begrudgingly accepted the scene before him.

Just that in this case, his intention of declining the gift and returning it would no longer be valid.

No one would ever give such a bunch of expensive items as thanks for some doled-out chicken soup. The main motive in doing so was to obviously pave a path; Lin Jie wasn’t the sort to not reciprocate

after receiving such a lavish gift.

Being forced to accept the gift now meant that he was also simultaneously agreeing to Ji Zhixiu's request—the right for Rolle Resource Development to be a distributor of the bookstore's books.

Additionally, he would also have to deal with troublesome endeavors which may arise in the future.

What a pain... I never expected Blackie to be such a glutton.

Lin Jie's eyes suddenly lit up. *Just accepting this golden apple will do! I'll just say "I'll accept your token of appreciation, but I can't give out the distributor rights," and return everything else. I believe Miss Ji will understand .*

However, the formless shadow then swayed, swelling up and enveloping all the other objects in the suitcase with a death-like grip.

Lin Jie: "..."

I was wrong, this fellow isn't a glutton but an insatiable demon!!! He's even worse than me! Lin Jie cried out in silence.

Though technically speaking, Blackie was Lin Jie's 'creditor' and he had yet to be compensated for his help all those years ago.

All Blackie had requested was for Lin Jie to promote his self-written books. However, those books that were written by Lin Jie were all academically inclined, and promoting them proved to be a hassle. Till now, he had managed to sell two books (of different contents)—one to Old Wil and another to the elf lady Doris.

With this sort of subpar work ethic, he really couldn't deny Blackie's current desire for the suitcase of objects.

Ugh, alright alright, you can have them...

Lin Jie reluctantly closed the suitcase back up. He hadn't even yet managed to enjoy this wealth presented to him, and it was now all gone in a blink of an eye.

Oh well... Out of sight, out of mind.

Lin Jie collected his thoughts, then raised his head to meet Ji Zhixiu's gaze. With his usual smile, he said, "Of course, but I'm not too proficient with these procedures. If you were to have any further relevant queries, do approach my assistant Mu'en later. She's currently next door and she will be available once she's off the clock."

It seemed like Lin Jie could only hope to sell more books through this partnership to compensate for the money lost.

But regardless of how many books are sold, it's still going to take at least a few years to make up the value of those items within the suitcase...
Lin Jie's heart ached at this thought.

Ji Zhixiu tried to stand up excitedly the moment she heard the words "of course."

However, she discovered that both her legs had turned to jelly and her back was drenched in a cold sweat. Before she could even get up, Ji Zhixiu had plopped right back down on the stool.

It seemed that anxiously awaiting Lin Jie's answer had already taken a huge toll on her.

In truth, this was indeed a gamble that concerned the lives of many.

Fortunately, they had eventually made the correct bet.

"Huu..." Ji Zhixiu exhaled. Her worries were lifted and she could now afford to give a relieved smile.

Having finally released her grip on the table's edge, Ji Zhixiu noticed how clammy and drenched with sweat her palms were.

She was lucky to be seated on a stool or else she would've immediately slipped and fell onto the ground.

That would've been embarrassing...

"Thank you for your trust."

We are Hosted Novel, find us on google.

Noticing the hoarseness in her voice, Ji Zhixiu attempted to remedy it by coughing lightly to quell the tremors in her voice.

“We will be doing our utmost to ensure your books will be marketed and sold,” she added.

Lin Jie only smiled. “Obviously, I would place my faith in a company as influential as Rolle Resource Development.

“However, my books are rather special and can’t be sold the regular way. I’ll do my best to select books that can be enjoyed by all and classify them for your perusal. Otherwise, there’s a possibility of some complications...”

“I fully understand.” Ji Zhixiu nodded and agreed with that sentiment. “Your books certainly have a comprehension threshold. Without adequate management, the consequences would be even more severe. You are very charitable indeed, Boss Lin.”

It was without a doubt that the books in this bookstore weren’t suitable for everyone.

Some might cease to remain human after reading them.

Boss Lin is really thorough about this. He must be afraid that without his guidance, those transcendent beings that read things they shouldn’t might have unimaginable consequences befall them... In those cases, death would merely be some ordinary trouble.

Charitable? Lin Jie’s lips twitched. Is there something wrong with Young Miss Ji’s language skills? She must have wanted to say considerate.... Never mind, probably just a slip of her tongue.

However, he really did have to carefully select the books.

Especially those books with more peculiar contents. In the worst-case scenario, if such were to be sold to others, the future of Norzin might be changed outright, causing great chaos.

Best-case scenario, such books would poison the minds of others,

causing great harm, and such an aftermath wasn't any better either.

It seems like I'll be rather occupied in the following days...

Lin Jie closed the suitcase and fastened the lid before placing it on the ground. "Is there anything else I can help you with? If not, please do make yourselves at home. We will iron out the details of our partnership when Mu'en is here."

Lin Jie then glanced at the middle-aged man who had been standing at the same spot this whole time. "Your chauffeur doesn't look too good. It seems like he could use some rest."

Ji Zhixiu turned to look at her father.

His consciousness had been temporarily lost due to the high exposure of mysticism he had experienced. As long as this didn't worsen and cause Ji Bonong to lose all sentience, it would still be a good thing.

Being exposed to mysticism also meant raising one's own internal mysticism.

Ji Bonong could now possibly transition from an ordinary person to a transcendent being... Everything would depend on Boss Lin's will.

And now, the situation had reached a boiling point.

Ji Zhixiu faced Lin Jie once again and added, "There's still one more thing."

"Oh? What might that be?" asked Lin Jie.

Ji Zhixiu bit her lip and muttered, "I would like to invite you... to my 20th birthday. I really do hope you can make an appearance."

Lin Jie was stunned. *Birthday party? Now that's new...*

Wait a moment...

This young lady who had once requested a rose from Lin Jie suddenly wanted to invite him to a very private and meaningful

20th birthday party.

What does this mean?

Lin Jie couldn't help but to be amused.

Chapter 273: How To Tactfully Reject A Relationship

Chapter 273: How To Tactfully Reject A Relationship

Table of Contents

Next Chapter (Teaser) ?

Lin Jie folded his arms and rubbed his chin as he fell into thought.

Previously, when he let Ji Zhixiu take her pick of anything as a gift, the young lady hadn't requested anything apart from a stalk of rose which he had grown himself.

In terms of value, besides it being slightly prettier than most, this rose which could be found anywhere else didn't have anything that really stood out. The only difference was that it was normally sold at 9 dollars on normal days but 99 dollars on Valentine's Day.

But regardless of how expensive it could cost, it was just but a rose in the eyes of Ji Zhixiu.

How could a typical rose sway Ji Zhixiu to request it? Therefore, the only plausible explanation would be the person she was getting it from.

Speaking of roses...

Lin Jie stole a glance at Miss Ji's ample bosom. The brilliant and delicate red rose appeared exceptionally eye-catching on the collar of her black dress. Yet, it was no different from Lin Jie's memory of it from a few months back.

Maybe Ji Zhixiu had used some sort of technologically advanced solution on it. Or perhaps the seed given by Doris possessed some unique properties, so the rose retained its initial lively look even after being plucked for such a long period of time.

Moreover, Ji Zhixiu was still keeping the rose by her side all this time.

Lin Jie couldn't help but delve into the implied meaning of it.

Search Hosted Novel for the original.

A girl, once hurt and betrayed, entered his bookstore on a rainy night... She had sought his assistance multiple times and seemed to be really dependent on him. She had requested a rose from him and kept it by her side for months, and now she was inviting him to her birthday party...

Lin Jie could only think of that sort of possibility.

One that made perfect sense.

The only problem was that he didn't have this sort of intention.

The more important question is how should I turn her down... It would be too hurtful if I am too blunt. I'll have to find an appropriate timing to do it tactfully.

But I can't be overly indirect either... If this isn't dealt with decisively, it would surely lead to more troubles in the future...

Lin Jie thought to himself.

Furthermore, she is such an important patron. If this isn't dealt with appropriately, I will lose a VIP customer and we can forget about signing the contract.

Despite considering himself a life mentor and chicken soup master, Lin Jie regrettably didn't have many unforgettable relationship experiences. It could even be said to be a complete blank.

Thus, Lin Jie felt that he was in a tricky situation at the moment.

Lin Jie's gaze on her made Ji Zhixiu nervous and her heart started to race. She could sense an imminent rejection.

Ji Zhixiu lowered her head in disappointment.

Indeed... Getting Boss Lin to head out is a truly difficult task.

From what she knew, Boss Lin had rarely stepped outside in these three years. The only exception was when he had to visit a nearby mall to purchase daily necessities as part of his disguise of an ordinary person.

Seems like Rolle Resource Development is still unable to attain a more powerful backing.

This request had been wishful thinking on their parts.

But since Boss Lin had agreed to give them the distributing rights, it was fine even if he turned down the invitation to the party. This was just a hopeful wish that would be the icing on the cake. What they had gotten at present was already more than sufficient.

“Truth be told, I was a little hesitant. Umm, in other words, I’m not really too keen on attending. You know it, I’m more of an introvert and prefer to stay in the bookstore. But aside from being business partners, aren’t we also friends?”

Lin Jie let out a sigh before smiling warmly at the young lady before him. “A kind and eager invitation from a friend shouldn’t be turned down.”

“Does that mean...”

Ji Zhixiu’s initial depressed expression shifted to a gush of ecstasy.

“You’ll come?!”

Her tone was still shaky as she could not believe this unexpected turn of events.

She is so delighted just from me accepting her invitation... Lin Jie nodded and broke into a smile. “That’s right, I accept your invitation. I will show up for your birthday party.”

Boss Lin agreed!

And... he personally said that it was an invitation from a ‘friend’!

The embedded meaning was obvious.

One, it implied that Rolle Resource would soon become a very important business partner of the bookstore.

Two, it meant that Ji Zhixiu would soon become Boss Lin's right arm deserving of his trust and she possessed the potential worthy of being groomed.

Ji Zhixiu could immediately feel the high expectations Boss Lin had for her. Still basking in joy, she quickly responded, "Thank you for accepting my demanding request. After hearing about you, my father also respects you greatly. I believe that he would be looking forward to your arrival."

Even though her father was right beside her and had temporarily lost his wits after that warning, she said so to prevent any awkwardness when they meet again in the future—mainly awkwardness on Ji Bonong's part—so Ji Zhixiu still had to try her best to change Boss Lin's impression of her father.

Upon hearing that, Lin Jie's smile got slightly wider.

"Is that so? I have long heard a lot about your father. I'm looking forward to being able to meet the chief decision-maker of Rolle Resource Development, ha-ha."

Somehow Ji Zhixiu felt that these words were laced with Boss Lin's sarcasm...

She cast a quick glance at her father, who still stood rooted to his spot, and let out a few dry laughs before responding cautiously, "No, no, you flatter him. He's actually just an ordinary man who often worries about the future of Rolle Resource Development.

"I have often spoken about you to him. He greatly admires your extensive knowledge and is very intrigued about your collection of books..."

At this point, Lin Jie wanted to bury his face from embarrassment.

Telling her father about me... Are we already moving to the stage of

meeting the parents?!

That won't do. If this continues, I'll be in deep trouble.

Indeed, I still have to resort to this solution if I want to reject her tactfully...

“Mr. Ji enjoys reading books as well? Then I'd handpick a book as a gift for when I meet him. But before that, I have a book for you which I hope you'll read through properly.”

Lin Jie went to the bookshelf beside him and picked out ***The Great Gatsby***. He felt that someone with the intelligence of Ji Zhixiu, heiress of Rolle Resource Development, would definitely get his point.

Alas, such a rejection was the most gentle way possible he could think of.

“People have to grow constantly. This is an amazing book which I hope you can gain plenty from. Treat it as an advance gift for your 20th birthday... Of course, I'll still prepare a formal present on the day of the party itself.”

Lin Jie placed the book in Ji Zhixiu's hands and said earnestly, “It's our instinct to chase what's getting away and to run away from what's chasing us.”

That was a quote from *Gatsby*.

“You will have to learn to control your instincts, else you will be unable to grow. When it's time to let go, learn to do so, and when it's time to accept, you'll have to as well... Do you understand?”

The deep, somber voice rang in Ji Zhixiu's ears, and all of a sudden, the book in her hands seemed to transform into a fragment of a strange creature, covered in some sort of uneven semi-flexible rainbow scale, with a white, thin stem and half the parts of a flower. In addition, it had white colloidal matter and green feelers which were constantly wriggling.

Such a thing was impossible to describe, but one could sense that

this was a part of something alive.

Then, in the blink of an eye, the terrifying illusion vanished and the book remained just a book.

The title of this book was ***Great Race of Yith.***

Chapter 274: Great Race

Chapter 274: Great Race

Table of Contents

Next Chapter (Teaser) ?

The mysterious and terrifying bit of the living organism created an immense, un-explainable illusion.

It was as though the complete history of a certain race, somewhere deep in the universe, was screaming with a collection of multiple twisted consciousness before her very eyes.

Set forth from countless different nodes and converged into a single point in time.

There, the chilling gale shrieked as an enormous shadow loomed in the sky, extending down and devouring the bodies of its tribesmen, destroying its glorious civilization and bringing about an impending sense of the race's complete annihilation.

They let out a final collective cry in the face of the race's impending doom.

“Seize, seize it all... Replace them!!”

“Become them!!!”

The vision of these collective consciousness spun rapidly before steadying down, and the view transformed into rainbow scales and long feelers.

Ji Zhixiu's eyes appeared lifeless and chaotic as these scenes bombarded her thoughts.

“You should learn to accept... understand?”

Lin Jie's voice lingered in Ji Zhixiu's ears, causing her heart to

tighten, then palpitate. Warmth returned to her blood-stream and it started circulating around her body once more after being frozen by the horrifying illusion.

She seemed to finally emerge from her numbed senses.

What exactly are those things?!!

Ji Zhixiu's eyes widened in disbelief as she regained her senses.

It was only now that she had realized that she had unknowingly left the bookstore. Besides the book from Boss Lin, there was also a copy of the contract regarding the distribution rights of the bookstore in her hands.

Wait a minute... Contract?!

Ji Zhixiu hurriedly retrieved the documents from the folder and carefully perused them from the top to bottom.

It was well organized and concise, with reasonable and sound payment terms that were mutually beneficial to both parties. Even in Ji Zhixiu's eyes, there were no bones to be picked.

In truth, she had been mentally prepared to receive a contract heavily in the favor of the bookstore. Such a fair and balanced contract was way beyond what she expected.

Ji Zhixiu's signature was signed clearly on the bottom column along with the Rolle Resource Development seal which bore their trademark logo of the 'descending stairs.'

Ji Zhixiu couldn't help but turn back for another glance.

In the bookstore, through the glass windows, she could see Mu'en in a customized waitress uniform brewing tea for Lin Jie. On the counter top was another copy of the contract.

It appeared that during that short span, Mu'en had ended work and returned to the bookstore to sign the contract with Ji Zhixiu.

Things were progressing very smoothly.

This novel is available on Hosted Novel.

...Apart from the fact that Ji Zhixiu had no recollection of doing any of those things.

When she attempted to recall, Ji Zhixiu would realize that she had indeed done those things, but the details were vague as if she were looking through frosted glass.

It was as though some other existence had controlled her and completed the tasks on her behalf during that time.

“Huff...” Ji Zhixiu took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. An answer had surfaced in her mind as she was scrutinizing the book in her hands.

The book this time around... is really special.

It was no longer like previous books that were about the usage of power or the realization of laws. In fact, it shouldn't even be called a book, but rather, the remnants of an entire race!

Great Race of Yith!

They were unique sentient life-forms that didn't just have control over the essence of time but also possessed a special ability of 'Mind Projection.'

Yithians could project their minds into life-forms and occupy their physical body, gaining every aspect of that particular race.

Just now, when she first caught a glimpse of that fragment, Ji Zhixiu's mind had undergone an exchange with the remnants of the entire Yith race's collective consciousness, thereby witnessing the whole history and message of the race.

And it was the consciousness of the Yith that had completed the series of tasks on her behalf.

As to why it wasn't just any individual consciousness, according to what Ji Zhixiu had witnessed, the great race eventually succumbed to their archenemy and met their demise.

Within this book were the remnants of the Yith's soul.

The residual strength which had now disappeared with the wind was only enough for Ji Zhixiu to gain the knowledge and strength of the Yith.

The great race had now completely disappeared.

But from another perspective, Ji Zhixiu had become the last member of that race.

“Mr. Lin entrusted this book to me because he felt that my previous strength wasn't sufficient to bear the burden of being the sole distributor of the bookstore, so I need to grow.”

Ji Zhixiu set aside the book and the contract spiritedly. “But right now, though I'm still unable to control the law of time with my current abilities, Mind Projection together with Steel Resolve can allow me to control several people at once as though they are clones of me.

“With this, whether it is Spider or Rolle Resource Development, both will become stronger than ever.”

Ji Zhixiu couldn't wait to realize all of it.

Yet, after the initial spur of excitement, Ji Zhixiu suddenly remembered that she had to deal with her dad who had lost his wits due to his carelessness with the extremely pure philosopher's stone.

She turned around, and sure enough, Ji Bonong was still in the state of shock as though he had lost all his senses.

Since Boss Lin hadn't reproached any further, this was probably the end of the punishment.

This state of losing one's mind was particularly common among hunters, and the treatment was simple: they would usually have the medicine prescribed by the White Magician with them.

Ji Zhixiu quickly gave a dose of the sobering medicine to her father.

“Cough cough...”

Ji Bonong shivered before regaining his senses, choking and coughing before he doubled over and took deep breaths.

He surveyed his surroundings with a lingering fear. Realizing that he was no longer in the bookstore, Ji Bonong was somewhat confused.

“I’ll leave the explanations for later. We’ve finished here, let’s head home first.” Ji Zhixiu gave her father a wink.

Having gradually regained his senses, Ji Bonong immediately calmed down and gave a nod. Continuing with his act of being the chauffeur, he opened the doors of the back seat for Ji Zhixiu before entering the driver’s seat.

Although his mind was absolutely boggled, he knew his daughter best. From her expression, he could tell that his daughter was elated, and thus he was able to keep his composure.

After driving for a distance, he finally asked in a shaky voice, “Did we succeed?”

“Yes, we succeeded, we won the bet!” Ji Zhixiu’s lips arched upwards, not bothering to conceal her delight. “Rolle Resource Development no longer has to struggle for survival at the hands of transcendent beings and will become a force to be reckoned with!”

“Great! That is terrific!”

Ji Bonong, holding onto the steering wheel tightly, almost broke into laughter. But all of sudden, he turned around with some remorse. “I’m sorry, my daughter, I did not expect to become your burden instead.”

Deep down, he could only smile grimly. He had come with the intention of providing more leverage for her daughter to gain additional benefit, but he had been ‘sealed’ the moment he came in.

The thoughts of a mere mortal had no place in the face of a transcendent being of this level.

He had really aged... In the future, he could only let go and have his child grow on her own.

Ji Zhixiu shook her head as she fiddled with her earrings. “No, you would never be my burden. On the contrary, I have to thank you. Without you, this deal wouldn’t have been a success.”

She shrugged helplessly. “Mr. Lin only agreed because of that suitcase of ancient remains...”

After sending off Ji Zhixiu.

Lin Jie returned back to his seat while Mu’en sorted out the relevant documents regarding the partnership beside him.

He took a sip of the freshly brewed tea before opening the huge suitcase, eagerly wanting to have a look at the exquisite contents within.

Click.

The suitcase opened, but it was completely empty.

There was only pitch black darkness ‘entrenched’ within. It wriggled a little before letting out a belch.

Chapter 275: Handpicked Books

Chapter 275: Handpicked Books

Thud.

Lin Jie shut the suitcase.

He took a deep breath and calmly swallowed the tea in his mouth. Then, he gently placed the teacup on the counter and smiled as he allowed Mu'en to collect the cup.

As he watched the gradually distancing figure of the teenage girl, the smile slowly faded as he reopened the leather suitcase with a gloomy look on his face.

“Come on, I thought you only wanted these things. To think that you would go one further and treat them as snacks. Are these even edible?

“Fine, perhaps these are edible for an unknown life-form, but isn't your appetite a little too excessive?”

Lin Jie stared at the empty suitcase in despair. This time, even the shadow within was nowhere to be seen.

Clearly, the culprit was adept at disappearing and the speed at which he escaped was top notch.

Lin Jie couldn't even catch a second glimpse of the treasures and didn't even know exactly what items had been inside!

All of a sudden, he sensed a strange, indecipherable voice ringing beside his ear.

It was similar to a rave or mumble, but Lin Jie wasn't able to discern whether it was a male or female voice and couldn't recognize the language either.

Yet, Lin Jie was able to pick up the meaning from it.

The voice seemed alien, yet at the same time, somewhat familiar.

Back when he was being transmigrated here, when Blackie's 'silhouette' form hadn't appeared, this had been how Blackie communicated with him.

Now, Blackie clearly had some actual form, yet he was still using these same means to communicate from afar.

It had to be said that this resembled a child that had been caught red-handed eating snacks on the sly by a parent and trying to pretend as though nothing had happened from fear of being punished.

"Catch it? You ate it by accident and want to return it to me now? It's useless to you?" Lin Jie asked in bewilderment as he hurriedly put out his hands in a motion to receive something.

Even though he didn't know what was going on, this probably meant Blackie was going to return some of the remaining objects.

He was both relieved and somewhat looking forward to it at the same time. Could it be that most valuable golden apple?

A strange, warped point appeared before him, rotating outwards before it 'spat' out an object.

The object fell into Lin Jie's hands and he stared at it intently.

It was the stone fragment with the flame markings.

Lin Jie was speechless.

You're really something...

Lin Jie examined the fragment on his hand. Apart from the markings on it, it bore no difference from an ordinary rock, and Lin Jie's face fell.

The warped point then smoothened by some formless imaginary

force and the raving voice disappeared.

Blackie was gone.

Lin Jie's lips twitched, not knowing whether to laugh or cry. He then went into a meditative state and placed the fragment into his dream realm.

“Well...The rune markings on this fragment are worth researching. Although there are some impairments, according to Candela's memory, these runes appear to be the characters used in the First Era, more ancient than those used in the Second Era...”

This was what Lin Jie reluctantly said to force himself into accepting the fact.

“But even Candela didn't learn these characters. I doubt I would even find enough relevant information even in the Truth Union's library if I wanted to make out what these mean.”

After stroking his chin several times, Lin Jie muttered to himself, “Ms. Ji mentioned just now that some of these things were excavated while Rolle Resource Development was expanding the Lower District. This means that large amounts of ancient relics are probably in the Lower District and perhaps there are things that I need there...”

He then shook his head. “The Lower District has restricted entry and I'd have to seek the approval of various organizations in the Central District and have a more persuasive reason if I wanted to head down. It would be out of the question if I were to make the request myself, and it'd be difficult for Rolle Resource to squeeze another person into their quota...Forget about it, I'll think about this again.”

Lin Jie sighed and stood up to stretch his aching back before turning around and moving toward the bookshelf behind him.

Right now, his main task was to handpick a collection of suitable books, which according to the contract was for Rolle Resource Enterprise to distribute on behalf of his obscure bookstore.

As for the price, commission, and how it was to be sold, all of it was well documented in the contract that Mu'en and Ji Zhixiu had signed.

All Lin Jie had to do now was to select suitable titles monthly and Ji Zhixiu would come over to collect them. And the following time that Ji Zhixiu showed up would be to give a sales report and just collect his profit.

Currently, Lin Jie's concerns were just as he had imagined.

Not all the books here were suitable for sales as many of their contents were unprecedented in this world and could lead to chaos if people with evil motives understood them.

As such, he had to practice caution.

With a single thought from Lin Jie, the collection on the shelf transformed into a section of novels.

That's right, after careful consideration by Lin Jie, this selection carried minimal risk and, at the same time, were literature works able to be more widely received by the masses.

Even if the contents had things that didn't exist in this world, it could be explained with the concept of "fabrication" and the readers would be enriched as well. This was the safest way forward.

All this time, he had often recommended various novels to patrons who frequented the bookstore and had yet to meet with an unexpected situation.

Moreover, common forms of literature with tropes such as romance and fantasy possessed even less risk.

After all, these were genres loved by the masses; regardless of whether people were from Earth or Azir, they were all capable of evoking emotions.

Thus, the first book that Lin Jie picked out was The Count of Monte Cristo.

This novel revolving around the theme of “vengeance” was the classical feel-good novel and, together with the roller-coaster ride of a plot, would probably make for a bestseller in this other world.

Then, Lin Jie thought for a bit and picked out *Pride and Prejudice*.

This was a classic romance novel, and besides being a love story, it contained some discussions about human nature and was unlikely to fall from popularity.

A comparison to this book was *Jane Eyre*, a title of similar popularity, perhaps even a slight bit more popular... Lin Jie did not have much opinion about it, perhaps because back in its era, this novel would be the champion work on feminism, symbolizing freedom and equality.

But to prize it as a work of literature would be too far-fetched.

The truth is that it's not much different from *Overbearing CEO Falls In Love With Me* (a manhua title), pooh-poohed Lin Jie as he picked out *The Old Man and The Sea* followed by *Water Margin*.

The Old Man and The Sea was undoubtedly Ernest Hemingway's most representative work, a true display of the human spirit.

As for *Water Margin*, Lin Jie personally felt that this was one of the Four Great Classics of Chinese literature that had the least cultural barrier. At the very least, it wasn't difficult to understand. Since others would be distributing it, Lin Jie reckoned he would just test the waters and observe if there was a market for it.

“These four should suffice, there's a little bit of everything now.”

Lin Jie nodded in satisfaction. “After all, this is our first partnership so I'll provide... 100 books each.”

Lin Jie felt he needed to be ambitious.

As he picked up the books and headed in the direction of the door, he suddenly stopped in his tracks and turned back. After a brief thought, he retrieved a copy of *One Thousand Classic Home-dishes*

(The Complete Colored 365 Days Edition) from the bookshelf.

Chapter 276: Some Hypotheses About Blackie

Chapter 276: Some Hypotheses About Blackie

Table of Contents

Next Chapter (Teaser) ?

“There aren’t many recipes similar to Chinese homemade dishes in Azir, and the people of this world would surely find it intriguing.

“Most of the ingredients can still be found here, and the remaining ones can just be substituted.

“These sections can be slightly modified...

“What’s more, the book is printed in color, so readers don’t need to worry about making a monochrome dish; this would definitely rapidly increase the book’s appeal.”

Lin Jie skimmed through the cookbook and had a gut feeling that this would be the bestseller among the stack of books he had picked out.

“Agreeing to give out the distribution rights is really quite a good choice. Now there’s a solution for books I couldn’t sell in the past, and I don’t even need to stress myself over it. My financial woes are finally over.”

He bound the five books together and patted the bundle in satisfaction.

Lin Jie had prepared books of various genres for this first batch. Once he stamped the bookstore’s brand—even though he hadn’t yet had a name till now—it would be a foolproof plan.

Just as he was about to think the shelves into displaying a hundred copies of these books each, Lin Jie suddenly hesitated.

“Why don’t I take this opportunity to also include one of my self-written books... Though the contents might be a tad specialized and requires certain levels of understanding to read it, I still believe that with a distributorship from Rolle Resource Development, the market would surely be large enough; perhaps there may be some academics in Azir that might be interested.”

He hadn’t forgotten that the price to pay for Blackie helping him transmigrate him here was to market and spread those self-written books of his.

This seemingly benefited Blackie, and from the looks of it, the relics from the underground given by Miss Ji had produced the same effect.

Although unsure of the reasoning behind it, Lin Jie knew that this was his mission.

Lin Jie fell into deep thought.

He suddenly came up with a few hypotheses about Blackie.

Before he ‘transmigrated,’ Lin Jie had already published five works under folklore studies, namely ***Emblems & Totems*** , ***Myths & Legends*** , ***Architecture & Aesthetics*** , ***Music & Dance*** , and ***Blood & Ethnicity*** .

Besides them, he had also completed a summative work, ***Ceremonies & Customs*** , though it hadn’t yet been officially published.

Of these books, ***Ceremonies & Customs*** had been lent to Old Wil. And it was after this that Blackie reappeared after being missing for three years and was able to reveal its physical form and even help with the circuit breaker.

The only affecting factor that could have occurred during this period was Old Wil studying ***Ceremonies & Customs*** .

Hence it could be hypothesized—

Blackie benefited from others reading, or learning from the books

written by Lin Jie.

Thirty copies of **Emblems & Totems** were sold to Doris for her to educate her clansmen. It was mostly a preview for them to brush up so that it wouldn't affect his work efficiency when the time came.

Blackie didn't show any signs of major changes after this incident, although it displayed the ability to teleport people when Lin Jie went to visit Old Wil.

But when he had appeared again just now, Blackie no longer conformed to its original 2D cut-out appearance and could now freely move at will.

And compared to the Blackie from three months ago, the current Blackie could now vocalize instead of writing on the table with water droplets.

The current Blackie bore almost no difference from the very same one Lin Jie had met during his 'transmigration' three years ago.

"Which means to say, Blackie must've expended a great deal of energy to 'bring' me here, hence the need for it to hibernate for three years. Then, because I gave that book to Old Wil, Blackie was able to reawaken."

Lin Jie rubbed his chin, thinking to himself, *It has only completely rejuvenated now.*

Therefore, he could basically ascertain that the above hypothesis wasn't unfounded.

Hmm... Since Blackie has recovered, perhaps he could perform another trade?

With this thought in mind, Lin Jie pulled out a copy of **Myths & Legends** from the bookshelf and placed it in the stack of the other five books.

"The others are too sophisticated, and only this fits the bill. These are numerous myths and legends collated from different local folks; hopefully it can somewhat be read as a fictional novel. While all of

these stories were written as examples for analysis, it should still incite some interests. I hope Young Miss Ji gives her best support.”

There was a reason why Lin Jie didn’t approach the Truth Union, an organization made up of academics to promote his books.

During his previous interrogation with Hood about the Truth Union, Lin Jie had learned that although the organization was said to be composed of scholars, all their different disciplines were leaning toward practical sciences—mechanics, medicine, etc.

That’s right, they condemned the liberal arts.

Under such circumstances, Lin Jie obviously wouldn’t want to make life harder for himself.

“Whatever happens next will all be up to Rolle Resource Development.” Lin Jie sighed heavily, though his eyes were still brimming with expectation.

Gazing at his own book, Lin Jie reached out and brushed the cover. He was reminded of Old Wil who was still tirelessly helping promote his work and seek out like-minded individuals.

I wonder how Old Wil is faring with those bunch of decent kids?

Baam!

The hefty main doors were struck open, alarming every servant in the grand hall. A noblewoman standing at the corner of the stairs accidentally dropped the vase she was holding.

Fragments littered the ground.

Her face was pale, and seeing the group of knights filing in made her shrill out, “Who are you people?!”

“This is the residence of the Great Radiant Knight Oswald. I have to warn you people...”

From her point of view, since these people were knights, they would surely hold Oswald's name in high regard. Thus, it would mean that they wouldn't try anything funny.

But she had forgotten one fact: if these people knew for certain, why would they be charging into the house so brazenly?

Search Hosted Novel for the original.

There was only one answer.

"Oswald?"

The lead knight was a charming lad with azure blue eyes and golden locks. He continued, unperturbed, "That's exactly who we are here for."

With a subsequent wave of his hand, he ordered half of his subordinates to detain everyone in the hall while the other half were sent to search for Oswald.

"No! You can't do this!"

The aforementioned noblewoman was Oswald's second concubine and was younger than the first by four whole years.

Pinned on the ground by a knight with her arms locked behind her back made her screech in pain as complete bewilderment showed on her face. She didn't have a single clue as to why these knights would blatantly ignore the rank of a Great Radiant Knight.

Amidst her struggling, Monica locked onto the lead knight, causing her to widen her eyes. "I know you! You are Joseph's disciple, Harry Claude!

"What are you trying to do here?! Does Joseph feel the need to dish out public vengeance all because of the children's spat between Todd and Melissa?!"

"This is clearly a blatant disregard for the rules of Secret Rite Tower; these actions violate the knight's code of conduct! I will report all of you to the Council of Elders!"

Claude merely grinned. “The kid is a tattler, and the parent is the same. Looks like this penchant is hereditary; do try and remember who disregarded the rules in the first place.”

Wiping the smile off his face, Claude then fished out a piece of paper from his chest pocket. “According to the results of the investigation, Great Radiant Knight Oswald Elliot was found guilty of partisanship, colluding with the enemy, accepting bribes, and tampering with evidence. Request to the Council of Elders to apprehend suspects for interrogation...

“Approved.”

Chapter 277: Fate Has Allowed Me To Grant You An Opportunity

Chapter 277: Fate Has Allowed Me To Grant You An Opportunity

Table of Contents

Next Chapter (Teaser) ?

In the study on the second floor.

Oswald appeared conflicted as his expressions changed unpredictably.

On the table before him was a broken stone gargoyle that had been reassembled as well as a dagger.

The stone gargoyle seemed dull and riddled with cracks, with only the eerie glint from the two blood-red eyes establishing the extraordinary nature of this sculpture.

It was undoubtedly extraordinary.

This was an evil construct capable of accommodating a thousand souls. When it came alive, it possessed enormous might, comparable to a peak Pandemonium-rank transcendent being.

Yet, the creator of this stone gargoyle being merely at mid-Pandemonium-rank back when he created it was evident of that black magician's talent in Creationism Magic.

Indeed, what was truly extraordinary was the creator of this sculpture.

'Faceless Black Scale' Wilde.

Oswald couldn't help recalling the moment when he had found out

about his grandson's folly. Having learned how highly regarded the bookstore was during the recent meeting at Secret Rite Tower made him despair as he didn't know whether he would accept this fate or fight against it.

At that time, Joseph hadn't yet started investigating, which also meant that with all the reputation and power Oswald had accumulated over the years, he did have the ability to destroy evidence, delay the investigation, and subsequently get into an arm wrestle with Joseph.

At the very least, things wouldn't be like what it was now, where his own home was being occupied after a matter of days even though he hadn't put up any sign of resistance.

Find the original at Hosted Novel.

The reason behind the current one-sided situation was simple.

It wasn't because Oswald had chosen to accept his fate.

Rather, it was the sudden appearance of the masked Wilde offering him a third alternative.

"Regardless of whether you believe it or not, I have no intentions of blathering with you. I'm only here to convey the unfortunate fact that Secret Rite Tower has decided to once again reappoint Joseph the rank of Great Radiant Knight.

"But, after so many years, the vacancies within the Great Radiant Knights have already been filled by new bloods with the best potential. To have Joseph return, one of the ten have to be replaced.

"That person would have to be guilty of a mistake for his title to be stripped off justifiably. At the same time, he should probably maximize his remaining value and serve as a stepping stone for Joseph's return, allowing our dear Indomitable Sacred Flame to claim yet another feat of serving poetic justice.

"Say, who might that person be?"

The surly vertical pupils of the half-snake-man flickered with a sinister glint, his low voice enticing and seemingly capable of influencing one's will.

Oswald clenched his fists tightly, his entire face twisted with fury as he let out an indignant roar while unsheathing his sword and charging forward. "No! It shouldn't be me! The Council of Elders will not abandon me. I am a Destructive-rank too! Whatever he, Joseph, can do, I can too!"

Wilde scoffed. "Destructive-rank? Do you really still think so? With your frailing body that has been wasting away on wine and women, you probably might not even be a match for a Pandemonium-rank now.

"They have long been meaning to get rid of you! You piece of trash!

"All your resistance is futile, because Secret Rite Tower will always stand on Joseph's side."

He caught Oswald's sword with ease, then took out the fragmented stone gargoyle and uttered, "Right now, fate has allowed me to grant you an opportunity.

"You can use your own blood to awaken it and it would give you the strength to fight against Joseph as never before. Afterwards, it would help you to become our comrade..."

"Comrade?"

"Yes. Aren't we comrades already?"

"Joseph is our common enemy... If you are going to ask why you should become one of us, you can see it for yourself. I'm much stronger than I was two years ago."

"You mean... I can too?"

"Heheh..."

By the time Oswald had collected his thoughts, he had already reached out to accept the stone gargoyle sculpture.

And before his very eyes, Wilde had already disappeared without a trace.

Indeed, he was far stronger than he was before! Just like a powerful monster that had no shadow!

Even Oswald was unable to discern what his power level was.

Baam!!

The sudden crash of doors breaking from the floor below caused Oswald to rouse from the past memories that were replaying in his head.

That meant that Joseph's men had already entered the residence and would arrive at the second floor shortly.

The stone gargoyle's eyes continued to glow with that eerie, evil luster.

This was the moment Oswald made up his mind and decided to bite the bullet.

He picked up the dagger and sliced his palm, allowing fresh blood to drip onto the stone gargoyle.

The stone gargoyle's mouth widened and spat out a book from its pitch-black orifice.

The book's title was *Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies*

.

"This is the way to acquire greater power?" muttered the frowning Oswald as he picked up the book skeptically and flipped it open.

In the hall on the first floor.

Monica stood in a daze as she stopped her struggling.

She stared fixedly at the document in Claude's hand. While she

didn't understand a single word written in the investigation report, the seal at the bottom right, a symbol of the golden tower, was beyond evident.

The usual seals for the various departments of Secret Rite Tower were all in red, and only a single, separate entity could use this unconventional gold—

Secret Rite Tower, Council of Elders!

Approved by the Council of Elders... This meant Claude and his men barging into the residence were under the orders of the Council of Elders.

They had approved the intelligence report and acknowledged it as the truth.

Oswald is finished. . A clear and terrifying thought emerged in Monica's mind.

Her face turned pale instantly as she slumped to the ground, losing all desire of putting up any resistance.

Colluding and conspiring with the enemy was a serious crime, and once indicted, even a Great Radiant Knight wouldn't have any excuses.

No, it was precisely because being a Great Radiant Knight meant that there was absolutely no chance of leniency as it would tarnish the virtue and authority of the title.

As such, once judgment had been passed, it would be resolute!

In the past, the actions of Oswald and his grandson, Todd, weren't unknown to the Council of Elders. They merely turned a blind eye to it as long as it wasn't too absurd and always ended with just a warning.

After all, Oswald was a senior knight within Secret Rite Tower and was of Destructive-rank. No one would be willing to lose such a powerful strength.

Yet, right now, they had decided to blow the lid off and more importantly chosen their stand in the feud between Joseph and Oswald.

And the deeper implied meaning couldn't be any more obvious.

The Indomitable Sacred Flame... might truly be about to make his comeback!

It's not just Oswald himself. The entire Elliot clan is probably going to be implicated as well!

Monica was well aware of the acts of the Elliot clan over the years. Her heart shuddered as she revealed a horrified expression. All her arrogance and pride had disappeared instantly as she hurriedly started to plead.

“Sir Claude! I will reveal everything I know to you, I have plenty of evidence in my hands. I beg you, let me off... I'm willing to do anything!”

BOOM!!!

A deafening blast rang out from the second floor, and the ceiling, walls, and support structures came tumbling down shortly after. Smoke and dust filled the air as an indistinct figure rushed out at breakneck speed.

The knights that had gone up just moments ago were reduced to a bloody mist with bits and pieces of them on the ground, walls—all around.

Chapter 278: Despicable Is The Epitaph Of Those That Are Despicable

Chapter 278: Despicable Is the Epitaph Of Those That Are Despicable

Table of Contents

Next Chapter (Teaser) ?

“Everyone, Formation 3, engage!!“

On the ground floor, Claude was the first to react and shouted out. He grasped the air as golden rays converged and transformed into a long-sword that appeared in his hand. At the very same instant, a figure charged out from the swirling dust and came crashing down with the howl of a deafening gale.

Its target was clear as it shot straight toward the most important person on the ground floor.

Claude!

He was the commanding officer and highest-ranked among the knights present. Most of all, he was the strongest. Once he was defeated, the others wouldn't be of any concern.

Naturally, Claude perceived this intent as he raised his long-sword and adopted a defensive stance. From within the smoke and dust, a pair of dark green, webbed claws emerged first.

This surprised Claude. *It's not Oswald?! Impossible! Probe magic had indicated Oswald was alone on the second floor! What exactly is this thing?!*

But he no longer had any more time to think.

These claws closing in on him were at least half a meter long. Claude could see the thick joints, razor sharp nails, waxy skin, and hideous scales. Along with the webbing between each individual claw, it was evident that their assailant wasn't human.

However, the long-sword merely parried the claws for an instant before shattering from the immense strength of the blow.

BOOM!!

A thunderous sound was created as a result of the clash, causing all the billowing dust to disperse.

Claude gritted his teeth as he was forced backwards by the remaining un-negated strength of that blow. A white glow erupted around him while all his muscles contracted as he activated the power of aether.

He let out a low grunt and held onto the fingers of his opponent, expending all his might to hold off this non-human creature.

Crackk...

A string of fissures started appearing on the stone floor beneath Claude's feet like an expanding spider web of cracks. At the same time, the ground was dragged along as Claude was pushed back, creating dragging long tracks along with him.

The immense impact had ruptured his internal organs and bones, causing his face to turn pale and spit out a mouthful of blood. Using his last remaining ounce of strength, he forced himself to squeeze out a "Run."

Formation 3 was a tactic of using a single person as bait and having others surround him and the target.

Everyone else had spread out at start and hadn't been caught in the duel, saving them from unnecessary sacrifice.

At this crucial moment, Claude made the right judgment and command in the shortest time possible.

Too strong... I could at most hold on for three seconds at best. Perhaps I'll already be dead by the time Teacher rushes here.... Claude thought to himself grimly.

During a quick glimpse while he had been retreating, Claude noticed that Monica, who had been pleading for her life earlier on, had turned into a fleshy paste from being caught in the fallout of the clash.

That non-human monster had finally revealed its face.

Its huge body stood about five meters tall and was covered in somewhat silky-smooth scales in a shade of dark green. At the same time, it also had hair as well as what seemed like glossy human skin on certain areas, though all its limbs were webbed claws.

Most peculiar was its head. Half of it was still Oswald's face; his expression pained yet with a hint of delirium. His pupils spun uncontrollably, and the vein on his forehead throbbed like a squirming worm. It appeared as if he had already lost his mind.

Meanwhile, the other half somewhat resembled an amalgamation of fish and frog.

The midpoint connecting the two halves of its face was dark gray with layers of wrinkled skin covered in a mix of slippery, viscous fluid and blood. One of its eyes completely protruded and was bloodshot, and its mouth was torn to its lips, revealing an array of razor sharp teeth.

“Guggugugugug...”

It let out an unintelligible rave, then switched to a human tongue, all the while with a deranged expression. “Great Lord...No, don't....Kill...Power...Save me...Save me!!!”

Baam!

As it let out a furious roar, the strength exerted by the creature continued to increase. Claude's forehead was completely covered in sweat as his hands trembled uncontrollably. He was only able to withstand it for less than a second before cracking sounds erupted,

fracturing all the bones in his body, and he was sent flying away as the white flame emanating from his body subsequently extinguished.

Though Oswald is Destructive-rank, his advanced age makes him a peak Pandemonium-rank at best. But this monster's strength is comparable to Teacher's! Despair sprung up in Claude's heart.

Who exactly is this 'Lord' it is referring to? The one who turned him into this monster? Right when we were coming here to apprehend Oswald... This must be a targeted conspiracy!

But there aren't many in Norzin with the power to raise a peak Pandemonium-rank to peak Destructive-rank...

Claude was defeated in mere seconds after the battle broke out, and however hard he thought right now no longer mattered.

The terrifying monster that Oswald had transformed into walked over to the fallen Claude and, with one hand, grabbed the knight but didn't kill him right away.

Instead, it lifted him up, revealing an eerie smile, then turned toward the door to meet the gaze of Joseph who was about to make a move.

"Our strongest former Great Radiant Knight, are you preparing to kill me?" The monster chortled as it tightened its grip on Claude, causing its sharp claws to pierce deeply into the latter's torso. "Or are you preparing to kill your beloved disciple?"

Support us at Hosted Novel.

"Now, I just have to use a little more strength and the disciple you are so proud of would be crushed to bits."

It no longer seemed as deranged and irrational as it had first appeared. On the contrary, it appeared like it had become even more intelligent.

Joseph's face was grave, but he made no move. He remained stationary with his fists clenched as an even more glaring, glorious

white blaze emanated from him.

He looked toward his disciple. Claude was already in his dying breaths, struggling to keep his eyes open as he could only gasp feebly. “Teacher...Leave...Kill...I’m...Dead...”

His innards had basically been turned into a mash, and most of the bones in his bloodied body had been shattered. Any ordinary person sustaining such injuries would have long been dead.

It was only because Claude was a transcendent being that he could still hold out till his final breath.

And with this breath, he had made a decision regarding his own fate.

For a moment, Joseph could see his past self in Claude. With an approving nod, he grunted, “You have done very well. I might not have been able to do a better job if it were me in that position.”

With that, he un-clenched his fists.

“Guugugugugugu!” Oswald exploded into a series of eerie laughs as he taunted, “Are you furious? Livid? But you are Joseph, you are destined to not give up on your own disciple’s life.

“Now, please watch me take my leave while you... are powerless to do anything about it!”

The huge monster paced back and forth arrogantly, then raised the claw that pierced Claude was impaled on, allowing for gravity to intensify his pain. “Enjoy this burst of anger, for this is the final outcome for righteousness.

“Despicability is a free pass of those that are despicable, isn’t that right?”

Joseph took in a deep breath as he stood his ground calmly. “Unfortunately, Oswald, despicable would just be your epitaph.”

“Huh?”

Oswald was taken aback for a moment. Then, as he was about to retort the stubborn fellow, he suddenly sensed a massive shadow looming over his head. As he instinctively gazed up, he saw an even bigger white giant reaching its palm toward him.

His vision turned dark and he no longer felt or thought anything.

The giant had no face and gently twisted Oswald's head off with one hand, while its other hand caught the falling Claude and laid him down among the wreckage.

—[Virtual Soul Realm]!

When Joseph extended his fist, it hadn't been to channel strength but rather to open Virtual Soul Realm.

Chapter 279: Restoring The Stone Gargoyle

Chapter 279: Restoring The Stone Gargoyle

Table of Contents

Next Chapter (Teaser) ?

The non-human monster fell to the ground with a crash, and the short-lived but breathtaking battle came to an end.

Personnel from Secret Rite Tower's Logistics Division could finally rush in to carry out treatment for the wounded. Although their abilities were lacking, or rather not suited for combat, these people were an indispensable part of every single Secret Rite Tower operation.

Compared to the Combat Division and Training Division which was entirely comprised of knights, as well as the Intelligence Division which consisted mostly of knights, the Logistic Division's composition was much more complex.

As they had to deal with way more things, the Logistics Division would also recruit talents from transcendent beings of other races.

Healing the wounded, tying up loose ends, collecting post-battle analysis, conducting identification reports for traces of aether... All of these were the jobs of the Logistics Division.

Caroline walked into the ruins of the destroyed mansion.

Although the battle only lasted for a mere few minutes after it started, the state of destruction resulting from it was terrifying.

The whole Oswald mansion had collapsed entirely. Surrounding buildings were affected as well, with more than half of them being razed to the ground. None of the servants in the mansion survived,

and knights that had been near the heart of the battle had met with the same misfortune.

The clash between Oswald and Claude had left behind a huge crater in the ground along with several chasms that appeared as if someone had plowed through the land.

Bloodied flesh and broken limbs littered the ground. Ordinary people like these were little more than paper pulps in the face of transcendent power. The little leakage from the aftershock was more than enough to shatter their bodies.

Destructive-rank, a deserving title.

“Thankfully, the battle only lasted a few minutes. Any longer, and the news tomorrow would probably report that the Central District was subjected to a terror attack.”

Even if this was the case, Caroline couldn’t help but feel somewhat troubled.

However, this was the usual situation when higher-ranked transcendent beings, especially two sides of a similar power level, met.

If both parties were unable to find an opening, a battle could last through multiple days and nights, just like duel between Joseph and Wilde in the past which caused an entire hilly region to be completely leveled.

However, if one side made a blunder, the battle would be over in the blink of an eye.

Just as it had now.

Caroline peered at Joseph who was cautiously removing Claude from the claw of the monster that Oswald had transformed into. Then, her gaze shifted to the area beside him.

An illusory white giant that others couldn’t see stood there unmoving.

Virtual Soul Realm... Is this the name of this ability?

Floating bits of information about that giant appeared in Caroline's vision as she mused, *I see, he picked up this ability from the bookstore recently. No wonder I had never seen it before.*

Oswald suffered from the disadvantage of having mismatched information, plus his rationality was halved, making him too slow. Otherwise, he would not have been deleted in an instant .

This was the ability bestowed upon her by the bookstore owner—Eyes of Gazing.

She had once been assigned by the Council of Elders to visit the mysterious bookstore and conduct an assessment on the threat level and character of the bookstore owner.

And thanks to her accurate judgment, she had made a significant contribution to Secret Rite Tower's current plans, resulting in her being promoted from Deputy Chief to the Chief of the Logistics Division.

In other words, she was of the same rank as Joseph...

But, it won't stay that way for long. With the conclusion of this battle, news of Joseph regaining his strength will spread like wildfire. On top of that, with Oswald's death, there is now a vacancy within the Great Radiant Knights which Joseph could conveniently fill...

Caroline pondered in silence.

Naturally, this was good news. Her initial assessment had allowed Joseph's Demon Sword transfer request to be approved, so the two of them enjoyed quite a pleasant relationship.

After all, the two of them could also be considered part of the bookstore faction...

With Joseph's comeback, she could also solidify her standing.

Caroline cleared her thoughts and went over to Joseph's side.

Her priority now was to analyze what exactly happened in this sudden battle and the reason behind Oswald's strange transformation.

Joseph handed Claude over to medical personnel and watched as emergency treatment was administered before members of the Logistics Division hurriedly sent Claude off to Secret Rite Tower for more extensive treatment.

Support us at Hosted Novel.

Such injuries, if not treated properly, would leave behind serious consequences. Joseph's many years of internal injury and suffering was because of this very reason.

"Have you figured something out?" Joseph turned to Caroline all of a sudden and asked in a solemn manner.

While the other traces of battle could be left to ordinary Logistics personnel to analyze, an existence of Oswald's level had to be left to the division chief.

A mysticism that was way too high could result in the investigator being influenced. Therefore, someone of adequate ability to withstand it had to be tasked.

"Just a second." Caroline stared at Oswald's corpse and activated her ability.

When she first gained this ability, Caroline had been unable to control the extensive amount of information that flooded her field of vision. As a result, she was in great pain as she struggled to adapt to it.

But through rigorous training daily, she had now gotten a grasp on controlling the power of Eyes of Gazing and was able to use it as she pleased.

A large amount of information first surfaced on Oswald's corpse which allowed Caroline to learn that Todd was in fact not his grandson but his son...

It was no wonder Oswald spoiled Todd so badly, resulting in the latter developing an arrogance that knew no bounds.

Too complicated...

Caroline couldn't help but shake her head. Such a person, from his morality alone, was unworthy of the title of the Great Radiant Knight. That was even before mentioning the other heinous deeds that he had committed.

The previous investigations by the Intelligence Division weren't falsified, but the Council of Elders had always overlooked and tolerated such a person.

She always felt that something was wrong, but the involvement of the Council of Elders made her hesitant. Eventually, she still decided not to employ the more extensive ability of her Eyes of Gazing to investigate the reason behind this occurrence.

Instead, she continued to investigate the source of Oswald's current state.

But the deeper she went, the more Caroline's frown deepened.

"What... did he see.... His mind couldn't handle it after being selected, and it continued to affect his physical body. The reflection of his soul caused him to transform into a manner that he was supposed to be... What exactly is that thing?"

This was the first time she had encountered a situation where Eyes of Gazing was unable to get a hold of the true circumstances.

She continued to probe and noticed that Eyes of Gazing still wasn't revealing any information, as if it were avoiding something taboo and instead pinpointing a particular part of Oswald's corpse.

Caroline squatted down and picked out the stone gargoyle from Oswald's clothes that was tainted with his blood.

A look of confusion appeared on her face. Where had she seen this stone gargoyle before and... why was it shattered into pieces?

Caroline perused the surface information and read it aloud, “The stone gargoyle is restoring itself after absorbing that powerful, guilt-ridden soul...”

The stone gargoyle took in the blood as the cracks on its body gradually disappeared.

Joseph’s eyes narrowed and he shoved Caroline backward. At the same time, the white giant extended its arm in a bid to grab a hold of the stone gargoyle.

Swish!

The eyes of the stone gargoyle glowed a striking blood red as it expanded its bat-like wings, turning into a huge looming shadow as it wrestled itself out from the grasp of the white giant.

Moments later, it had escaped.

Joseph could pick up a familiar aura. In an instant, he knew who the mastermind behind this whole episode was.

He raised his head and saw a pleased old man floating in the sky above extend an arm to receive the stone gargoyle which had once again shrunk in size.

“Wilde!!!” bellowed Joseph.

Chapter 280: Great Friends

Chapter 280: Great Friends

Table of Contents

Next Chapter (Teaser) ?

The levitating Wilde extended his arm to receive the stone gargoyle that had returned to its miniature statue form.

Beneath the mask, those eyes of his narrowed as he examined the stone gargoyle while twirling it. Wilde verified that there wasn't a single bit of defect, and in fact, it appeared to have gotten many times stronger.

If I were to use other high-grade material for another round of restoration and refinement, then combine it with Oswald's soul as the actuating force and absorb the remaining ninety-nine souls from transcendent beings, perhaps it could possibly reach the level of a Destructive-rank. ..

However, a construct is ultimately still a construct, and its intelligence would be no match to a person in an actual battle.

It's unlikely the completed stone gargoyle can defeat an actual Destructive-rank, but it would crush anything below without a doubt.

Destructive-rank isn't an easily attainable rank after all, unless one is fortunate enough like Vincent to be bestowed that power from Boss Lin.

It's probably already stretching its max potential for such a rough construct to be able to reach Destructive-rank.

Having analyzed it all and satisfied, Wilde proceeded to chant an incantation. A void opened up beside him and he placed the stone gargoyle inside.

"It would suffice as a guard for Boss Lin."

He wasn't the least bit surprised to learn about the stone gargoyle being destroyed.

After all, this was merely an ornamental piece of craft to Boss Lin and it was expected for the stone gargoyle to be damaged after some careless knocks here and there.

Furthermore, the reason for the stone gargoyle's damage was because the young false god turned Boss Lin's pet had sucked the stone gargoyle's existing souls dry and used them as a nourishment to strengthen itself.

That meant to say, Boss Lin had used the stone gargoyle as 'cat food.'

A pet that was likely to become a Supreme-rank compared to his clumsy work from years ago naturally couldn't be mentioned in the same breath and had a drastic difference in value.

Even if Wilde had been given the choice, he might still have fed the stone gargoyle to the young false god out of curiosity to find out how much growth it could achieve.

Thus, Wilde felt that the stone gargoyle had met with a worthy end.

Moreover, it wasn't as if the stone gargoyle couldn't be restored. As long as a powerful enough soul or sufficient souls could be found; best if it were a corrupt soul—like the current one.

Wilde shifted his gaze and eyed this old friend whom he had not met for a long time, Joseph. They last had a brief encounter at the bookstore's entrance, but it could hardly be considered a meeting.

He landed on the top of a nearby building, kept away his cane, removed his hat, and gave an elegant bow. "It has been a long time, my dear friend. Calm down. It has been almost two years since we last met officially, but you are as hot-tempered as ever," said Wilde calmly.

He was interrupted midway because the white giant constructed by Joseph's 'Virtual Soul Realm' had instantly appeared behind Wilde and viciously crashed its fist on him.

The punch did not miss. On the contrary, the white giant's punch had mercilessly smashed Wilde's head off.

But strangely, Wilde didn't die.

In fact, he still continued to speak.

On his shattered head, flesh and brain matter began squirming, forming the shape of a mouth as his eyes were reconstructed, giving him a strange, deformed appearance.

“Flesh Puppet.”

Joseph had a good understanding of Wilde's moves and scoffed. “Your masterpiece is as gross as ever. I'm not sure if I call you a coward or say that you are as timid as a mouse since hiding in the sewers is second nature to you.”

He hadn't expected his attack to do anything and simply just wanted to enjoy the sensation of smashing Wilde to a pulp.

There was definitely something up with Wilde for him to be out in the open so blatantly. The previous time he had gotten a hold of him had been because an exceptionally rare transcendent object had appeared within the white hills.

Two years ago, Secret Rite Tower had coordinated with Joseph to set up an impenetrable web and finally cornered the diabolical, Destructive-rank black magician. Back then, Joseph paid the price of losing an arm and having internal injuries wreck his entire body just about to kill Wilde.

Yet... Wilde still remained alive!

Although there was a high possibility that this was due to the bookstore, the prerequisite was that Wilde had to first arrive and subsequently enter it.

Which also meant that Wilde was still alive when he arrived at the bookstore.

Wilde was crafty, meticulous, and had great willpower. Why would

a dangerous and diabolical magician expose himself to danger so casually after just narrowly escaping death?

“Haven’t you learned some manners after what you went through for the past two years?” Wilde asked in astonishment as he pointed at his brain that had been squished into mush.

Joseph scoffed. “This is my manners.”

Support us at Hosted Novel.

He extended his arm, then clenched it as the white giant formed by the ‘Virtual Soul Realm’ mirrored his movement and squashed what remained of Wilde.

Blood splattered everywhere, then recombined to form a warped humanoid figure in the same spot, with black flames glittering where its eyes were supposed to be.

The two stared daggers at each other and the stifling atmosphere appeared all set for a showdown. A battle between the two peak Destructive-ranks seemed imminent.

At least, that seemed like the case to Caroline.

All the hairs on her body were standing on end and she had broken out in cold sweat as she cautiously retreated to the edge of the ruins.

She ordered her subordinates to make preparations as well as to contact the Truth Union to have them standby the recently completed large-scale teleportation array to evacuate people in the Central District.

The figure made out of blood mist remained silent for a moment before bursting into laughter. “Not bad, really. It seems like Boss Lin has also bestowed strength upon you. My Lord’s benevolence doesn’t change even for the ignorant.”

Obviously, Wilde wasn’t one to take insults and immediately started to sing praises for Lin Jie while chiding Joseph as a fool at the same time.

Joseph did not rebut but instead wondered. “Lord? You view Boss Lin as your Lord?”

Or... Is there another meaning?

He had initially thought that the Sun’s Faith was what Boss Lin wanted to spread, but right now, it appeared that Wilde was working for Boss Lin, which could also mean that he was currently operating under Boss Lin’s instructions.

Perhaps, there was an even more dangerous faith that was currently spreading...

Wilde extended both arms as he broke out in a maniacal, deep laughter. “Such a noble, esteemed, and extraordinary existence, why couldn’t he be my Lord? And what difference is there between Secret Rite Tower and I, your elders are probably obsessed with seeking ways to make themselves servants of Boss Lin.”

He eyed Joseph and went on, “Shouldn’t you be thanking me? Boss Lin sent me here to restore the stone gargoyle, but I’m actually eradicating this mole to save you fools from being played by the Path of the Flaming Sword.”

Mole?

Path of the Flaming Sword?

Oswald was a mole of the Path of the Flaming Sword?!

Wilde didn’t wait for a reaction from Joseph and started to ridicule, “Tut-tut, why do you think Oswald managed to remain in Secret Rite Tower for such a long time? Just ask that other patron of the bookstore what he’s been up to all these years.”

With that, the figure of blood mist shrunk and disappeared.

Joseph’s face was dark. Virtual Soul Realm was unable to get a hold of the concentrated bloody mist as he had been momentarily distracted.

Wilde opened his eyes and relinquished the control of Flesh Puppet.

A blood mist encircled his hands and the stone gargoyle appeared.

He gazed at the anguished soul struggling within and sneered, "You offended Boss Lin and still thought of acquiring power?

"That's really foolish of you. We begin with you, and the next would be your even more foolish grandson... Oops, no, son."

Chapter 281: A Knight Cannot Go Back On His Words

Chapter 281: A Knight Cannot Go Back On His Words

Table of Contents

Next Chapter (Teaser) ?

Within the ruins of Oswald's Mansion.

“Damn it!”

A furious Joseph punched through a half-broken pillar, making it collapse and causing dust on the ground to fly up.

Although it appeared that Joseph had gained the upper hand right from the fight duel, Wilde hadn't even turned up in his physical form and was merely using the sorcery of Flesh Puppet.

The few punches that Joseph threw appeared completely dominating, but they had no effect in truth. Attacks on the puppet—with the exception of curses—were ineffectual on the caster and were only useful for one to vent some displeasure.

But for a magician of Wilde's standing, even a curse on the puppet would probably be largely useless and result in a backlash on the user.

Aside from that, Wilde's parting words had severely affected Joseph's mood and made him feel as though he had been led by the nose...

This meant that perhaps Wilde knew far more than himself with regards to the behind-the-scenes happening at Secret Rite Tower!

Such a realization caused Joseph to feel exceptionally frustrated.

Furthermore, Wilde's words implied that this incident had

something to do with the Council of Elders.

After all, Oswald, as one of the Great Radiant Knights, could only be restricted and supervised by the Council of Elders. Before the Council of Elders made their judgment, no one would suspect a Great Radiant Knight since they were the faces of Secret Rite Tower.

If he had really committed more heinous crimes than what had surfaced, for instance—as Wilde had mentioned—being a spy for the Path of the Flaming Sword, all this time while assuming such a sacred role, then it definitely had something to do with the Council of Elders.

In other words, the Council of Elders... might have really been infiltrated by a mole from the Path of the Flaming Sword!

This was an absolutely horrifying realization.

Once a mole managed to infiltrate into the highest echelons and gain power to control the entire organization, it basically meant that such an organization would be finished very soon.

The Church of the Dome that had been recently taken down was the best example.

Joseph's face contorted in displeasure several times before he managed to calm down and un-clenched his fist.

I can't rule out the possibility that Wilde is trying to mess with my mind. This is a grave matter that requires me to make reliable judgment.

Support us at Hosted Novel.

Although Wilde had claimed to have come under Boss Lin's orders, Joseph knew that he definitely couldn't trust anything that guy said from having dealt with this diabolical adversary over the years.

There was a slight twinkling in Joseph's eyes as he took his gaze away from Oswald's dead body.

But... Wilde took Oswald's soul to repair the stone gargoyle he had

gifted to Boss Lin.

And back then, Oswald's grandson had sent someone to search the bookstore and ultimately reported it in an attempt to frame Melissa.

Wilde had just so happened to step out of the bookstore at that time. According to Claude, in his hands at that time... was the shattered stone gargoyle!

If Boss Lin's intention then was for Wilde to restore the stone gargoyle, then Wilde would naturally understand that those small fries and even Todd weren't worthy of Boss Lin to mention them. Moreover, the souls of these weaklings are probably insufficient for the stone gargoyle's restoration.

The message here was clearly for him to capture Oswald's soul!

If all this was Boss Lin's will, then, on the contrary, it seems to be the most reasonable explanation...

However, Wilde mixed the assignment with his own personal agenda, making use of Oswald to deal a heavy blow to Secret Rite Tower knights who went forth to apprehend the latter.

This was his first act of vengeance upon his return after two years.

And things would only increase in severity in the future.

Joseph's train of thoughts was broken by Caroline's voice. "I can find some traces of information left behind by Wilde just now. If I follow them, I would be able to locate his physical location relatively quickly. Do you need me to make the necessary arrangements and coordinate with you?"

Although this was what Caroline said, relief was written all over her face. In truth, she heaved a great sigh of relief when she saw that this battle wasn't going to pan out.

They were in the Central District after all, and if the two Destructive-ranks were to engage in a fight, there would be tremendous stress on the Logistic Division. If 'the ones' in slumber were to be startled awake, the consequences would be disastrous,

and Secret Rite Tower would have to answer for it.

But from this point of view, Wilde probably had the same concerns, which was why he chose to employ Flesh Puppet instead.

Joseph shook his head. “Even if we head over now, he would have probably set up a trap or hidden himself by the time we arrive there. It’s futile even if we can track him down... This operation by the Intelligence Division is a complete failure and I cannot allow my subordinates to be exposed to any more danger given the circumstances.”

Without a doubt, they were adversaries that knew each other inside out.

However, the operation this time around had been headed only by the Intelligence Division, without any professionals from the Combat Division due to fears that Oswald would be informed. As such, the overall combat strength was obviously insufficient.

And with this lethal move from Wilde, the strength of the Intelligence Division had been halved.

Especially so for Claude... the sole disciple of Joseph had nearly perished at Oswald’s hands.

At the moment, besides the pent-up years of vengeful rage, Joseph probably also felt a deep sense of dread.

He certainly couldn’t afford any more risks from both an emotional and logical standpoint.

Caroline nodded and offered some comfort, “He will surely make another move. When you have officially resumed the position of Great Radiant Knight and have control of the Combat Division, that would then be when Wilde gets his dues.”

Joseph’s brows narrowed as he was reminded of Wilde’s words—how did Oswald manage to keep the position of Great Radiant Knight all these years?

If he really had a member from the Council of Elders as a backer,

then what would this person do with Oswald's successor following his death?

'Joseph's comeback' appeared to be a matter of course to everyone, but what if it was all a scheme being manipulated by someone?

"No," Joseph uttered. "I once promised Winston to never vie with him for the position of Section Chief of the Combat Division. A knight cannot go back on his words."

Caroline was slightly taken aback. "So, what are your plans?"

"Wasn't Oswald from the Training Division originally? I'll just replace his position then."

Joseph continued, "As for the position of Section Chief of the Intelligence Division, I'll leave it to Claude once he has recuperated. He has already grown into a force of his own."

"I believe the Council of Elders will probably adopt my suggestion."

Having aired his intentions, Joseph changed the topic. "You can continue with your work that was interrupted. As for the information about Oswald..."

You probably retained it, right?

Joseph stared at her with a profound gaze, then extended his hand and the words 'Bookstore' appeared in gold on his palm.

Caroline was startled and hesitated for a moment before nodding. Turning her attention back to Oswald's corpse, she further examined the information embedded within...

Theodore officially moved his shop into the unit within the mall constructed by Rolle Resource Development.

He surveyed his unit that had been renovated before letting out a sigh, after which he picked out a book from a box in the corner.

It was this special book that made many people and even powerful factions take note of him.

Chapter 282: Once Bitten, Twice Shy

Chapter 282: Once Bitten, Twice Shy

Table of Contents

Next Chapter (Teaser) ?

Theodore was a secondhand bookseller.

As this profession was passed down in his family for generations, Theodore had been 12 when he began assisting his father at Tulip Bookstore. Since then, he had been in the trade for over three decades and had garnered quite some reputation in Norzin due to his extensive experience.

Besides trading secondhand book collections, he would collect some books that only had sole copies or ones that intrigued him as his personal hobby.

Or rather, everyone who ran a bookstore would more or less have a special relationship with books.

Yet, it was this very hobby that got him into trouble...

Theodore did not have the ability to determine how much trouble it was, but he instinctively understood that it was probably beyond what a bookseller could manage.

Even though he had forged friendly ties with some powerful aristocrats in the Central District through out-of-print or expensive book collections, these connections were utterly useless here.

Because this matter had exceeded the range of foreseeable expectations and was quickly moving toward one which far surpassed the imagination of ordinary beings...

Theodore had gotten his hands on the book through a Lower

District smuggler.

Interactions between the Upper and Lower District were forbidden, and the sole passageway beneath the Central District was under the watch of Rolle Resource Development and Central District military. Theoretically speaking, smuggling activities were basically impossible, and Theodore didn't have the slightest clue how the other party managed to do it.

That fellow had been very tight-lipped and refused to divulge any information. Naturally, Theodore understood the rules and did not probe any further.

Yet, it was undeniable that smuggling between the Lower District and Upper Districts would bring about a hefty sum of profit. Apart from books, there were much more valuable items.

This book was merely an ancient book that was both incomprehensible and damaged and was something the other party wanted to conveniently get rid of.

It so happened that Theodore was fascinated by such unique books. Thus, when he received this news, Theodore got someone to deal with the smuggler and get hold of the book.

But it all went wrong somewhere and information was leaked. That smuggler who seemed to have a powerful backing just vanished, and nothing was heard since then.

The middleman that Theodore had entrusted the deal with also similarly vanished without a trace. Days before the disappearance, the middleman had come by in a hurry and dropped a single sentence before leaving—"Don't admit it!"

Theodore was befuddled and at a loss, but the matter died down for a period of time.

He had nearly forgotten about it until... a customer showed up asking about that book.

"I heard from Juliana that you have some goods from the Lower District. I'm interested in stuff like that, so may I have a look?"

Juliana was another middleman that Theodore was acquainted with. She was a long-term partner who recommended customers that were all reliable and trustworthy.

Theodore didn't think much of it and since nobody had bought any of the things he had gotten from the Lower District for quite some time, he decided to bring the customer to the room where he exhibited his collection.

But just as he was about to open his mouth and speak, he suddenly recalled the deathly stare of the missing middleman before he had left that resembled the look of a trapped beast.

"Don't admit it!"

As Theodore observed the exceptionally profound, sincere eyes of the customer, out of nowhere, a sudden instinct came over him.

Trying his utmost to keep his cool, Theodore instantly gave an apologetic look and explained that he had entrusted it all to the missing middleman to get rid of those items because he had felt they were dangerous.

"I'm truly sorry." That had been what Theodore had said.

The customer turned silent and stared at his face for about half a minute before meekly replying, "Such a pity."

And then, the customer left immediately.

Theodore subconsciously heaved a sigh of relief and only then realized that his entire back was drenched with sweat. Deep down, he was rejoicing about having recalled that stark warning.

Yet, evidently, it was way too early for him to be happy.

This entire matter only truly began after that encounter.

People would show up inquiring about the book every couple of days, as well as the appearance of a couple of strange fellows among the customers that visited his bookstore.

This novel is available on Hosted Novel.

Theodore could sense that some of them harbored ill intentions but didn't take any further actions due to some concerns he was unaware of.

One time, he overheard a customer's murmuring, "Bookstore? No way another one, right?"

Afterwards, the way the customer viewed Theodore strangely... as though pondering whether he was observing some form of extraterrestrial.

Theodore vaguely understood a bit. That so-called fear seemed to be due to a particular bookstore which subsequently made these people develop some sort of trepidation toward all 'bookstores.'

He didn't know either... Exactly what sort of bookstore was capable of making them so jittery?

However, such apprehension did not persist for a long time. As more people turned up, these people gradually stopped concealing their expressions and their words turned more pressurizing.

Danger was silently approaching.

Till one fateful day where Theodore witnessed a customer that came to inquire about the book morph into an eagle immediately after stepping out of Tulip Bookstore!

That's right, that person transformed from a human into a bird!

Moreover, right before the eagle took flight, it intentionally turned around and shot Theodore a look of pure unadorned evilness.

Theodore understood at once. Something big was going on around him!

He had long heard about the existence of 'Transcendent Beings' in Norzin—entities that transcended mere mortals, including magicians, knights, elves, and even dragons that were still a part of the many legends that were still in circulation in this day and age!

Yet, having never seen any of it, Theodore had merely viewed this as casual mealtime conversation topics.

But now, he had really encountered such a thing!

And they were all headed straight at him.

Theodore was paralyzed with fear from this realization...

After panicking for quite some time, Theodore finally calmed down and recalled the advertisement Rolle Resource Development had put up some time ago in the commercial district between Street 23 and 24.

Given Rolle Resource Development's enormous scale, these transcendent beings couldn't possibly make their move there, could they?

Without any hesitation, Theodore spared no effort to obtain a lease for a unit there and managed to successfully relocate all his goods and business in the shortest time possible.

"Hopefully, Rolle Resource Development would cause them some apprehension... But what should I do if they were to really pursue me there?" Theodore could only grimace weakly.

What could he even do as a mere defenseless mortal?

"This book... What exactly is it?"

Theodore stared at the book in his hands. He couldn't help but mutter aloud the question he had no answer to and did not have the guts to find out.

He had also tried reading the book in secret before, but unfortunately, he didn't understand a single thing written on it.

While it was classified as a book, it actually seemed more like a diary as the writings were all handwritten and accompanied by some indecipherable hand-drawn illustrations. Most of the pages were damaged, and there were even some blood-stains.

Besides that, the only comprehensible words were some meaningless scribbles scattered across the pages. The handwriting, too, was exceptionally strange, as though they were being copied by a kid who had recently learned how to write with many drawings beside as if to explain something.

Theodore mulled over it for a long time, and after repeated comparisons, he vaguely reckoned that the book's format resembled...

Some sort of research journal?

Chapter 283: The Power Of Food

Chapter 283: The Power of Food

Table of Contents

Next Chapter (Teaser) ?

Theodore was somewhat appalled by his absurd conclusion.

But if this was really some sort of research journal, then the owner of it had been researching these warped scribblings that seemed as though they were forcibly written by a kid that had barely learned to write.

But... What was there to be researched about all these?

These characters were simple, a bunch of commonly used and seen words... For instance, “You,” “I,” “Great,” “Sun,” “Sky,” “And,” “Light,” “Father,” “None,” and so on.

Even a random three-year-old kid off the streets of Norzin would be able to understand the meaning of these words. Was it necessary to have pages upon pages of strange explanations along the margins?

If this were research on the ancient carvings on some relic, then it was nothing special.

After all, these words could contain historical information about the ancient days which historians and aristocrats might find both intriguing and valuable.

Theodore used to collect such books and resell them for at least thrice the original price, which was an exceptionally lucrative business.

This had been his initial intention this time as well, but he never expected to find himself in such trouble...

Yet, the more it was like this, the more he felt this matter was bizarre.

To conduct such a meaningless act of research is truly... truly... difficult to describe! Isn't it all too foolish?

Theodore stared at the journal before him with a frown and started to ponder, yet was still unable to come to an understanding despite racking his brains out.

“Could it be... my assumption is wrong? Even though it greatly resembles a research journal, this might just be my own personal perception.

“These common Azir words could be added as a smokescreen, and these characters that I do not understand are the cause of the transcendent beings’ interest?”

In the end, this was the only reason that Theodore could convince himself with and the only conjecture that could allow him to put an end to all this wild guesses.

He was going to lose his sanity otherwise... This feeling was just like back in the days of school, when he encountered a difficult mathematical problem. No matter how he tried, he would feel more helpless the more he attempted to solve it. Just like an invisible obstacle hindering him, causing him to despair the higher he climbed.

We are Hosted Novel, find us on google.

Theodore didn't want to lose his mind before he even came to face true despair.

He had always been good at regulating his mind and remaining calm. Otherwise, in the perilous situation he was in, he wouldn't have been able to keep his cool till now.

Most people would have wet their pants upon witnessing a person turn into an eagle before their eyes, wouldn't they?

If that was the case, the uncanny reservations those transcendent

beings had because of the keyword 'bookstore' would have surely disappeared upon his show of fear.

They would have probably made their move the very next day, and Theodore would likely have no opportunity to save himself.

"Sigh."

Theodore sighed again as he placed the book back into the box. He couldn't help fretting, "Nothing will be solved if this goes on. Ever since that person openly demonstrated his abilities in front of me, they would no longer be held back by such ridiculous excuses anymore.

"Also, what's the deal with this so-called 'bookstore'..."

All sorts of peculiar people came to his bookstore and they varied greatly. Yet, at least a third of them would display strange reactions toward terms like 'book' and 'bookstore.'

From this, Theodore could cautiously confirm his suspicions were definitely not wrong.

At this point, his hands came to a halt as if a bolt of understanding had struck him.

"Wait a minute... Bookstore?!"

Theodore stood up at once, picked up the book, and went to stare across the street.

Less than a hundred meters away, by the road, was a bookstore without a signboard.

It was old and empty, and there were hardly any customers in the past few days.

Yet, it had been capable of making the young heiress of Rolle Resource Development show up respectfully with gifts in tow.

Could this be... the bookstore that they have been referring to?! The crazy thought appeared in Theodore's head as he lost his

composure.

Previously, he had been so preoccupied with his anxiety that he hadn't thought of it or even considered bringing others into it.

But right now, after connecting the dots, it seemed like he had found the key to the puzzle!

When Theodore had been a kid, his father would tell him that there weren't so many coincidences in the world.... Once an idea comes, never hesitate and just trust it!

Theodore made up his mind instantly and shut the box, picked it up, and rushed toward the bookstore across from him.

He didn't know if he was mistaken, but Theodore vaguely sensed that he seemed to be watched by someone the moment he left his bookstore.

Those gazes full of malice on him made him pick up his pace.

Lin Jie was playing with his cat.

In his hand was a cat toy that he had created from materials that Mu'en had bought.

Seated on his chair, Lin Jie waved the toy around excitedly, teasing chubby Whitey as it chased the feathered end clumsily.

With this cat teaser, Lin Jie had fully demonstrated his artistry. The rod had been crafted by him, the nylon string tied by him, and the feather was... picked off from a shuttlecock. In fact, he had even polished and waxed it.

No one would have any qualms if this toy was placed for sale as merchandise.

Honestly, it was because Lin Jie was bored with too much time on his hands, which allowed him to craft it to perfection.

Apart from reading, he had basically nothing else to do.

At first, he had been worried that there wouldn't be any customers showing up for him to make ends meet.

But with the opening of the book cafe next door, he no longer had to worry about that and could be said to have entered a retirement phase—playing with his cat and entertaining the two young ladies.

“But from the looks of it, Prima has more or less recovered from her injuries and has quite a good grasp of *Compendium of Materia Medica*, it's probably time for her to return home.”

In fact, Prima could return in a few days' time because Andrew had just given him a call, informing him that everything had been resolved...

Lin Jie had curiously asked Andrew how he had managed to resolve the situation.

After all, he had learned from Prima that though her clan did not make up a huge percentage within the Truth Union, their standing in the organization was unparalleled due to their long heritage.

Even if the Vice-Chairman wanted to resolve the conflict—said to be due to the contrasting beliefs of their clan: Prima and her sister were conservative, while Jerome's faction was radical—there had been some difficulties that could not be resolved within a day or two.

Andrew just said that the milk tea that he brought back was heavenly.

Lin Jie was dumbfounded.

Despite Boss Lin's befuddlement, Andrew was dead serious and said that some had been reluctant to try it at first and were against it.

But after his warm persuasion, they drank it all and only had praises for it as they completely fell in love with the beverage.

Afterwards... While basking in the great taste of the milk tea, both

sides decided to let bygones be bygones as they came to an agreement. Years of conflict dissolved, and the reunification of the clan was completed.

Lin Jie had his doubts but ultimately decided to let it go.

Watching Whitey chasing after the feather diligently but to no avail, Lin Jie smiled and uttered, "Perhaps, this is the power of trans-world food?"

Chapter 284: Familiar Journal

Chapter 284: Familiar Journal

Table of Contents

Next Chapter (Teaser) ?

Thanks to a cup of milk tea from another world, the internal strife within Prima's clan over their beliefs came to a halt.

Even though things between the two factions had already escalated to the point of Jerome sending an assassin after Prima, Margaret still missing, and eventually an unnatural death for Jerome, with the common recognition of a fine beverage, the two factions had finally managed to find a common ground after such a prolonged period of time.

And it was at this moment where they recognized that all of them shared the same blood-line and the unity of their clan was far more important than their nihilistic beliefs—the blood that flowed in their veins was the same and there was no reason to go against each other.

Afterwards, they shook hands and made peace with one another.

According to Andrew's description, this was probably what had happened in Lin Jie's point of view.

Hmm... That isn't too much of a stretch.

After all, the power of food had no bounds.

In any case, young Prima would be able to leave the bookstore a few days ahead of schedule.

But when Lin Jie broached this to Prima, the young lady panicked and expressed her unwillingness to leave, instead insisting that she wanted to stay at the bookstore for a couple more days.

The reason she gave was simple. “Mr. Lin saved me and imparted to me such important knowledge. I have nothing to give in return, but I still hope to be of some help to Mr. Lin...”

Naturally, this ‘help’ she was referring to was to be a waitress at the book cafe next door and assist Mu’en with the running of the place.

Which also meant being the assistant to Lin Jie’s assistant.

Lin Jie watched the young lady that had become his assistant’s assistant do a pretty credible job and decided to let her be.

After all, apart from the daily three meals he was providing her, Prima was basically working for free and Lin Jie didn’t want to waste such a wonderful opportunity.

Moreover, given her sister’s disappearance and having her own uncle send an assassin after her meant that having some lingering psychological trauma toward her clan was inevitable.

Returning back would definitely require some mental preparation.

Thus, Lin Jie had allowed Prima to remain for a few more days. However... This wasn’t a long term solution, and she would have to eventually return and face her own demons.

Lin Jie’s current plan was to have Mu’en accompany her back when the time came.

While Mu’en appeared to be around the same age as Prima, her combat abilities were incomparable as she could beat up five young, strong lads with ease in just moments—referring back to Hood and his poor accomplices.

Also, Mu’en was rather reliable when dealing with matters. If she saw things going awry, she would probably make a run, phone Andrew, or settle it herself.

Lin Jie was thinking about finding an opportunity to inform Prima of his arrangement when the doors to his bookstore were suddenly pushed open.

“Welcome.”

Lin Jie swiftly kept aside his cat teaser and looked up to see a tall, skinny middle-aged man that appeared troubled.

Whitey skidded forward due to inertia, then immediately raised its head after coming to a stop and assuming a dignified posture while giving a prideful “meow.”

From what Lin Jie saw, the middle-aged man had a clean appearance and was dressed in a vest over a white shirt, long pants, and leather shoes. He wore golden-framed spectacles, and his hand held a book or rather... a journal.

The middle-aged man’s expression was filled with anxiety and unease, yet there was a slight glimmer of eagerness as well. Upon entering the bookstore, he gave the bookstore owner a friendly but cautious smile before shutting the door.

...Do you have to act like you are here for some covert espionage activity or a secret transaction?! Lin Jie couldn’t help ridiculing in secret.

Judging from this middle-aged man’s manner, he didn’t seem like he was here to get a book but was acting as if he was here to buy something that couldn’t be made known to anyone!

And dude... You are so nervous that your entire forehead is already covered in sweat!

“Hello,” the middle-aged man called out as he approached the counter. After taking a deep breath, he observed the cordial young man smiling warmly and felt a little hesitant at once. “May I know if you are the owner of this bookstore?”

“Yes, this is my bookstore,” Lin Jie replied with a nod.

Although chances were that this person wasn’t here to make a purchase, he still made the usual inquiry, “Are you here to borrow, read, or buy?”

The middle-aged man walked to the counter and took a seat. As if

he had just made a decision of utmost importance, he placed the journal on the table. “No, umm... I am Theodore, a secondhand book dealer. I recently rented a space across the street, which is in the newly constructed mall by Rolle Resource Development. I am here because of this book...”

Oh... Someone from the industry?

Judging from things, could he be here to sell the journal to me?

Lin Jie eyed the shabby journal on the counter-top. It had an ordinary black cover with a patchy stain and was missing a corner. From the folds and stains, it was evident that this book was at least a few decades old.

This is really... secondhand indeed.

Of course, Lin Jie was being humorous. It was evident that this journal had some historical value; for instance, it could have been written by someone famous, contained some important information, or documented a significant event.

Just that... Since he said he was a secondhand book dealer, he ought to know the value of such a book very well.

If Lin Jie’s assumptions were right, the value of this journal would be rather high. So why hadn’t he approached someone who would be much more interested, such as an academic or a museum?

Rather, he had come to an ordinary... and to some extent, a poor bookstore.

He wouldn’t possibly be using a worthless book to deceive an honest operator of an ordinary bookstore, would he?

Like me...

Find the original at Hosted Novel.

Lin Jie crossed his arms and pondered, eventually deciding to remain silent so that he could pretend to be an expert while waiting for Theodore to explain himself. The book alone wasn’t enough to

tell him anything.

The latter continued somewhat in trepidation, “Actually, I don’t really know much about this book. I bought it from someone else and only know that it was from the Lower District. In fact, I don’t even understand the contents. But I have encountered some really... strange events because of it.”

Lin Jie leaned back slightly and raised an eyebrow before picking up Whitey and began stroking it. “Strange events?”

Theodore nodded. “Yes... I have been followed and investigated by some unknown people and they were all after the book. A-also, it has all gotten way out of hand and I am at a loss, which is why I’m here to seek your help!”

He carefully added on, “A few days ago, I saw a Rolle Resource Development car stop at your entrance and witnessed the young heiress visiting with gifts, which is why...”

So, you think that I’m some sort of godly character?

You’re mistaken... I’m merely an ordinary bookstore owner. I’ve only picked up some transcendent abilities recently, and I’m slightly stronger than an ordinary person at best.

But at least, he had finally understood what was going on. *So it’s like this, huh... trouble caused by Young Miss Ji.*

Lin Jie frowned and rubbed his temples. “Let me first have a look. I’m just an ordinary person with limited abilities after all, and I might not necessarily be able to help you.”

Lin Jie reached out to receive the journal. The stain on the cover, according to his experience, was probably a blood-stain.

Looks like this journal will tell a remarkable story.

But for some reason, Lin Jie seemed to find this journal rather familiar.

As if he had come across it before somewhere.

Chapter 285: Professor Lin

Chapter 285: Professor Lin

Table of Contents

Next Chapter (Teaser) ?

Lin Jie gently stroked the journal in his hands and he could feel this sense of familiarity vaguely intensify.

Where have I seen a journal like this before? wondered Lin Jie to himself.

But it's impossible... According to Theodore's description, this is an ancient book from the Lower District that's at least several centuries old. I've only been here three years since transmigrating, so how can it be possible for me to have seen this book?

At the very least, even if I had stumbled across a similar journal in these three years, the impression shouldn't be this fuzzy given my memory.

Lin Jie was being conceited. By the age of 21, he was a university lecturer and had managed to publish his own book. And the only thing that allowed him to reach the pinnacle of being an arts student at such a young age was his memory skills.

If even this was being denied, then Lin Jie wouldn't have any remaining strengths at all.

Having a photographic memory was beyond him, but at the very least, he should be able to clearly remember something that he had seen or experienced within the last three years.

At the same time, Lin Jie had great trust in his own instincts.

If he reckoned that he had seen this book before, then it meant that he had definitely come across it.

Therefore... there can be only one answer.

Lin Jie's finger traced along the edges of the stain. This was a mixture of mud and blood that had solidified into a thin layer, fusing with the original cover like a thick shell and hiding the original patterns.

Before I transmigrated to Norzin, on Earth—

I came across a journal like this when I was still there!

Lin Jie's expression turned grave. This was a huge problem!

Why would something that he had seen before he transmigrated appear before him now and in the form of an ancient relic from the Lower District that was several centuries old?

What exactly did this journal signify?

His eyes narrowed as he stared at the journal. He was no longer trying to solve Theodore's problem right now. Instead, he was scrutinizing the book to answer the many doubts that had surfaced in his mind.

Search Hosted Novel for the original.

Lin Jie flipped open the journal and looked at what was written on the first line... *Oh, nothing, alright. The first sentence was largely covered by the stain and there wasn't much left of the original text.*

Via the interior pages of the book, it was even more obvious that the stains were dried blood. There were also some silk remnants as well, which could have been from some particular organization.

That's frightening. I wonder what kind of horrible situation the owner of this journal got himself into? Lin Jie thought to himself as he progressed further along.

The sentences gradually got clearer from the second line on, and the meanings behind were straightforward and didn't pose any problems to reading.

Theodore already had a confused expression on his face as he watched the young bookstore owner flip open the book and waited with bated breath for the latter to ask questions about the contents.

He had been confused as well when he had first taken over the book from the smuggler because he didn't have the slightest clue about what was written inside it.

Therefore, he could only ask the smuggler about it, but regrettably, the smuggler's response was that he was equally clueless...

Before selling the book to Theodore, the smuggler had already conducted his own research for some time, but it yielded no results.

Even so, the absence of information was information itself.

He could therefore be certain that the writings did not belong to the language systems of Norzin. In fact, according to the absurd claim by a specialist from that team, this language wasn't from Azir.

In other words, if no user of that language ever showed up, nobody would be able to understand them!

Yet, the events here deviated beyond Theodore's expectations.

He actually witnessed the young bookstore owner, upon flipping open the book, go through pages in succession without any pause... Not only did he stop, he appeared to be in deep thought from time to time.

Don't tell me, he... understands this kind of language?! Theodore shivered.

"The first round of the expedition is in its final phase and the second round of the expedition is about to commence. I've compiled and submitted all the research notes on the writings found on the relic. Hopefully, the research institute can quickly come to a conclusion on our hypotheses."

"To be honest, I am eagerly looking forward to it. This would be an

unprecedented and tremendous discovery!”

“But just like with all other things, haste makes waste, and we still have to wait patiently.”

“Next, I will be using this journal to document all information that I come across, including my personal thoughts, feelings, and perceptions.”

“This actually seems more like a diary than conducting research.”

“Ever since young Wang from our team became hysterical from stress and forgot everything he experienced during the expedition, Professor Lin made it a requirement to do this as an avenue to unwind our psychological stress and also as a precaution from losing any more important research material.”

“Professor Lin is the veteran of the team. Despite being only 30, he has seven to eight years of archaeology work under his belt and is always reliable in everything that he does.”

“20th March, sunny.”

“Preparations have proceeded as planned, all members are in position and the second round of expedition officially commences.”

“At present, we have already descended 120 meters. The entrance has been expanded and cleared twice, and fortifying structures have all been put in place; the probability of it collapsing is very slim. Everyone appears to be much more relaxed now.”

“It was indeed just as Professor Lin had envisaged! After descending another mere three meters, the entire passageway has straightened and became an ordinary flat path. Previously we weren’t walking on ‘paths’ but rather ‘walls.’ This building was first collapsed and then buried in time.”

“The characters that I have imprinted are not complete and still require much more samples for verification.”

“I’ll be carrying on with work.”

There were many missing pages in the middle section.

“27th March, sunny.”

“We encountered some difficulty today. The engineering team informed us of an unfortunate news—the geology is unsuitable for further excavation as it could cause a landslide. The team could only withdraw temporarily and await further progress by the engineering team.”

“28th March, sunny.”

“The engineering team uncovered a ‘gate.’ ”

The remaining words were covered by blood-stain and there was a missing page.

“31st March, rainy.”

“It is certain that this was an overturned, enormous palace-like construct. The center was like a plaza and I’ve never seen any architecture like this...”

“The torrential rain has made work extremely arduous. Water kept constantly seeping in from the top, bringing along with it mud. Perhaps the weather has gotten hotter, for it felt slightly warm when it dripped on my neck.

“We did not find the load-bearing pillar... in fact, not a single pillar. As a result, that old fellow who proclaimed himself to be an architecture expert went into a fury, complaining that we weren’t serious in our work.”

“This damned old fogey. What else can he do apart from being

sarcastic?”

“Makes me want to remove his tongue.”

“1st April, rainy.”

“We unlocked a complete mechanism; the central plaza was a deeper tunnel. Professor Lin and Professor Zhang decided to explore further.”

“I’ve heard that they have only been married for two years, but their lovey-dovey ways made everyone else envious.”

Chapter 286: God Has Come

Chapter 286: God Has Come

Table of Contents

Next Chapter (Teaser) ?

“6th April, rainy.”

“It’s a whole foreign new world beneath the tunnel. What I saw had me both perturbed yet excited... My apologies, just moments ago, I couldn’t hold back my chuckle which seemingly frightened the lady beside me.”

“I guess I’m a little out of sorts, but as an academic, it’s only natural to feel excited when there’s an undiscovered civilization before you, right?”

“It’s the same for the others as well, I could see the gleam in Professor Lin’s eyes. Even though he tried his best to retain his composure and maintain the dignity of a leader, his expression of uncontrollable excitement gave him away.”

“This archaeological operation was initiated by Professor Lin after all, and it’s probably like he’s personally unearthing treasure with a spade to him.”

“In comparison, Professor Zhang appeared to be a little worried.”

“7th April, rainy.”

“I discovered a near-complete book full of words. This means that my research samples have increased a hundred, or even a thousand fold. What a happy yet frustrating event!”

“I could feel my head being flooded with inspiration just from looking at these wonderful pages filled with words. Though I was

unable to comprehend their meaning, yet through some strange connection, I could understand the meaning being expressed.”

“I can’t wait to decipher this code that comes from another world.”

“15th April, rainy.”

“Excavation work isn’t progressing smoothly, and with the persistent torrential rain over the past half a month, everyone’s in low spirits.”

“I’m starting to get frightened. Somehow... the 29-person research team has been reduced to half due to deaths and injuries. Everything here is foreign and danger lurks everywhere. I could sense someone tailing us every moment, and it’s as if there’s a pair of eyes staring at us from the darkness.”

“He It... or perhaps ‘He’ is more appropriate.”

“Whenever I light up a match in the dark, I can feel ‘his’ breath brushing past my face as the flame flickers.”

“Professor Lin wants us to pick ourselves up. So long as we manage to bring back the things that we discovered here, every single one of us will be remembered in history, just like Columbus... No, we would be greater than Columbus.”

“...Of course, we have to get out of here first. However, our entrance path was sealed by the landslide yesterday. At that moment, one of the female team members went hysterical on the spot... I’ve never practiced medicine or any related discipline, so I couldn’t be certain if she was truly insane. All I recalled was that she was constantly mumbling some muffled words as she kept headbutting the rock that blocked our path with all her might.”

“I witnessed her arm snap, her skull bloodied and smashed inwards. Even so, she persisted to knock herself against the mud-stained rock... till her death.”

“I’ve seen Old Wu again. Just beside the female team member. I

turned back as I was about to leave, and he was standing right there facing me with his mouth widened like a pitch black abyss.”

“But thankfully, he didn’t make any infuriating sarcastic remarks this time.”

“20th April, rainy.”

“I suddenly had an idea, an unprecedented one!”

“All those questions that were bothering me were resolved and I could suddenly understand the meaning of those words—thoroughly and completely. It’s as if I’ve become one of them and they were speaking to me... I hid in my tent to study for an entire night and I was so excited that I could hear the subtle vibrations of my mind.”

“When I showed my journal to my colleagues and students, none of them understood and even mocked that I was drawing a talisman... A talisman?!”

Subsequent text on that page was covered with messy and thick strokes of ink, but it was evident that these appeared to be various profanities.

“...Maybe I shouldn’t fault them. I already belong to a whole different world the moment I could understand these.”

“23rd April, rainy.”

This novel is available on Hosted Novel.

“A part of this notebook was drenched by the rain and about three pages have smudged. This is bad, I should have realized it earlier.”

“I don’t have any more additional paper to rewrite those pages. At first, I thought that I would be able to recall the contents of the journal, but to my surprise, I can’t even remember what I had for

breakfast today.”

“Being under tremendous pressure for such a long time has affected my perception of time thereby, causing my memory to turn foggy. This was what Professor Zhang told me. She asked me not to think about it and just be relaxed.”

“She is really young and according to the gossip I’m hearing, used to be Professor Lin’s student. There was much to talk about their romance, but right now I can only ramble on in my mind.”

“But this has got nothing to do with her abilities. Professor Zhang is an exceptional psychologist and I’m always inclined to believe what she says.”

30th April, rainy.”

“The endless rain is just so frustrating.”

“The team has already been reduced to five members. Professor Lin, Professor Zhang, Shao Yiwen, a course mate whom I’m not familiar with, and another of Professor Lin’s students, a young lad called Duan Xuemin, and lastly, me.”

“Yiwen’s right arm and a small part of her body was bitten off by those things and she’s bleeding profusely. I watched her organs leak out through her wound and fall to the ground as we ran out of bandages and ointment and could only use our clothes.”

“The un-subsidizing high fever has caused her to lose her mind. She’s either unconscious or would blabber gibberish occasionally, although I could clearly understand what she was saying.”

“While tending to her at night, she spoke to me about the time she got baptized and mentioned about playing in church. How she felt warm, how she lost a copy of *The Bible* that she always kept with her. She started to sob as she talked... This was my first time learning that she was a Christian.”

“At midnight, her eyes widened and she muttered, “God has

come”.”

“10th May, sunny.”

“I’m the only person left.”

“This isn’t the best way to put it. To be precise, I strayed away from them. Currently, I’m curled up in a small corner, exhausted and thirsty. There’s this constant bloody stench in my throat and it’s unbearable. I’ve already gone blind and my eyes are in constant pain.”

“Fortunately, we have held out long enough and I’ve made a new discovery. I’ve compiled and organized everything below... Part of the research came from Shao Yiwen, which is worthy of recognition. She’s done an amazing job, a really amazing one.”

“I felt my consciousness beginning to blur. The ground started to shake and elevate, and as I was slipping, I thought I heard the sound of an infant crying.”

“I’ve seen Old Wu again.”

Chapter 287: Lin Jie's Tampered Cognition

Chapter 287: Lin Jie's Tampered Cognition

Table of Contents

Next Chapter (Teaser) ?

The diary entries in the journal stopped there.

It was highly likely that the owner of the journal had met his demise.

What remained, including an assortment of individual pages, were all regarding research conducted by the owner of the journal, the 'I' in the diary entries, about the 'words from an unknown civilization' and 'the code from another world.'

While it appeared like a huge amount of obscured jargon, for a well-learned person like Lin Jie, linguistics still fell within his scope of knowledge.

After all, folklore included everything related to general culture, so it wasn't too difficult for him to understand something that was closely related to his expertise.

What was truly perplexing was that the one journaling all this would often scribble chunks of messy and incoherent text out of the blue, which ruined the completeness of the entire research journal.

Yet, from the stroke changes and corresponding diary entries, the journal owner was most excited and inspired when he was scribbling these strange characters.

According to the words of the one recording, it was 'having an unprecedented idea, and completely understanding the meaning of these words' which led to a giant leap forward in the research.

Differentiating these ramblings from the true research content was the main point in extracting valuable information while reading through this journal.

But... this was on the premise that the journal was worth reading.

Is he really still sane?

Lin Jie couldn't help doubting after reading through it once.

But in truth, Lin Jie already had his answer from reading the diary entries.

On the first page, the owner of the journal had already mentioned 'Wang', a team member who had become hysterical after being placed under tremendous stress.

From the various details at the end, it wasn't too difficult for Lin Jie to deduce the truth.

While carrying out research with the archaeological team, the owner of the journal had gradually lost his sanity and went on the path of lunacy and perished, just as Wang and the other team members who had lost their lives along the way did.

The diary entries seemed perfectly fine and the attached research was very well organized at first. Things took a turn... on the 28th of March, when the engineering team had discovered a "gate."

Once more, Lin Jie flipped the diary back to the page as he analyzed.

Before the appearance of this gate, the weather was sunny all along, and yet after its introduction, it began to rain everyday. This was an abnormal sign of a split personality.

Although a nonstop torrential rain isn't impossible, just like Norzin did experience a few months back. But the problem is... they were subsequently trapped underground due to debris from the landslide.

There wouldn't be any problem if it was just groundwater seepage. Deep groundwater is indeed warm, and his sensation matched it.

However, the diary repeatedly emphasized ‘rain.’ There’s bound to be a geologist in a large archaeological team of close to thirty. There’s no reason for them to mistake it as rain water.

So... adding things up, from Old Wu who infuriated the writer and had lost his tongue in his next appearance, as well as the writer being furious when others didn’t understand his research findings, to the journal being drenched with ‘rain’ three days later...

This so-called ‘rain’ is likely to be blood.

Lin Jie stared at the blood-stain on the journal and was reminded of the phrase in the journal, “I can’t even remember what I had for breakfast today”...

Seems like the journal definitely tells a tragic story.

Lin Jie sighed once more as a rough hypothesis took shape in his mind.

If his guess was right, this archaeological team was from Earth. They had probably stumbled upon the passageway to another world, which was Azir, and entered the remains of Norzin’s Lower District.

Subsequently, it could be the inter-crossing electromagnetic field of both worlds or perhaps some other issue that arose when crossing the barrier between the two worlds which led to the entire team perishing... Only these notes were left behind.

If that was the case, the writer mentioning that “They would be greater than Columbus” wasn’t all that difficult to fathom.

Columbus merely discovered the ‘New World,’ but this group had instead found an entire whole new world!

Their names would undoubtedly go down in history if they were to publish these research findings.

Yet regrettably, Lin Jie hadn’t come across any such news before he transmigrated. The institute that was backing the activities of this team probably met with their own problems and went silent after

the team failed to return.

Up till Lin Jie came to this other world and stumbled upon this journal.

Previously, he was still somewhat confused about Young Mike's code name of Michael and the origins of how Path of the Flaming Sword got its name.

Now, it all started to make sense.

The organization named Path of the Flaming Sword had probably found ***The Bible*** that Shao Yiwen had misplaced, thereby resulting in the creation of such a grotesque order.

But besides this, there were still some areas in the journal that were difficult to comprehend. While this could all be swept under the rug easily by claiming that it was the ramblings of a mad person, it was rather concerning as well.

For example, what was that 'thing' that had torn off a part of Shao Yiwen's body?

And what was up with the journal owner hearing the crying of an infant at the end?

Support us at Hosted Novel.

Also, what about the fates of the team leader, Professor Lin, as well as his student and Professor Zhang?

However, Lin Jie's focus was on neither of these.

The most critical point was the characters that were being documented in the research journal. The 'words of an unknown civilization' and 'code of another world' was the language widely used in Norzin.

In Lin Jie's view, these were all Chinese characters...

Indeed, they were clear and well-defined Chinese characters, and the meaning of each one of them was clear.

At worst, the handwriting was just a little crooked.

Yet, the owner of the journal was pretentiously conducting research on these characters. The explanations and meanings would match at times, while there would also be some discrepancies. Other times, the explanations would be totally nonsensical or even the complete opposite. It was truly hilarious.

What was even more ridiculous was that the owner of the journal himself was writing in Chinese characters.

This was a classic example of looking for the donkey you are riding on.

Therefore, in Lin Jie's eyes, this whole journal was like the ramblings of a madman; absolutely meaningless and even made him want to laugh.

However, laughing was the last thing he would do now.

There could only be two possibilities under such circumstances.

Lin Jie took a deep breath, his expression solemn. *The owner of the journal was deranged from the beginning, even before the appearance of that "gate." This so-called research doesn't exist and it's all a part of his delusions.*

Or... my cognition was tampered with after I transmigrated. Thus, I was able to automatically understand the characters of this other world. To the research team, these characters were incomprehensible, words of an unknown civilization.

But they appear as familiar Chinese characters in my eyes.

Chapter 288: A Fatter Blackie

Chapter 288: A Fatter Blackie

Table of Contents

Next Chapter (Teaser) ?

In Rolle Resource Development's newly constructed mall, Tulip Bookstore.

This newly renovated shop was still a little messy. There was a stack of discarded materials by the entrance and boxes full of secondhand books behind the door.

There weren't many valuable items in the bookstore as it had just been relocated. Most of the more valuable books were locked away in the cabinet.

As such, Theodore, who had just left, wouldn't have expected a red-eyed pigeon to fly into his bookstore and transform into a person after 'cooing' twice.

And from the shadow beneath the pigeon's feet surfaced a shadowy figure that subsequently transformed into a person as well.

One of the duo was wearing a hooded gray robe. He had grizzled white hair and a vicious-looking face. In his hands was a short, golden scepter with a wolf head tip.

The other person was clad in a tight-fitting black shirt, with his face concealed in the darkness. His wrists and ankles were bandaged, and he wielded a set of golden, razor-sharp claws in his hands. Hanging on his shoulder straps was a row of daggers, while there were three black swords attached to his belt.

If there were any personnel from the Truth Union present here, these two would have been immediately recognized as criminal transcendent beings and notorious mercenaries that were on the top

of the bounty list.

The former Wallis, a Pandemonium-ranked druid from the Sapir clan that used the wolf as their totem. He was skilled in summoning and shape-shifting magic.

The latter, who had an ill reputation as “Shadow Assassin,” was Louie. He was adept at stealth and had once assassinated a Destructive-rank.

Wallis scanned through the boxes of books. “It’s not here. Looks like we are late.”

Louie didn’t respond and instead headed to an opened box at the side and stared at the traces that it had been rummaged through.

Wallis walked over and raised his scepter and gave it a little wave. A layer of pale blue light appeared over it, and he lowered his head and uttered, “He has gone out, together with that book.”

He followed the faint blue footsteps which extended from the boxes and led outside. Then, he looked up and saw the dilapidated bookstore across the street.

“That looks like... another bookstore?”

Wallis hesitated. He had heard about the rumors of an unknown bookstore in this area.

Even though there were only a handful of such rumors and most seemed extremely exaggerated, unbelievable, and lacked any tangible information, many of those coveting the book had some reservations because of this and dared not make their move.

Also, the informer he had back with the clan had come back with news about a matter relating to the Chapman Witch. It was said that she had gotten her power through gaining the support of the bookstore.

This made him apprehensive.

“How about we just wait for now? When he returns, we will take

him captive and interrogate him...”

Louie sneered the moment Wallis proposed his idea. “Are you certain that the book will still be with him when he returns?”

“That...” Wallis frowned as he thought to himself. *You can’t possibly be thinking about barging into the bookstore and snatching it, right?*

If that bookstore is really as those rumors say...

“You don’t have the luxury of choosing.” Louie returned back to his shadow form and melded into the other shadows in the room. “Don’t forget, the organization has tasked us to retrieve the book. You know as well as I do what the consequences are if we do not accomplish it.”

His chilly tone lingered in the air. “Besides, that display of weakness totally disappointed me. I might have to postpone your admittance into the organization.”

As Wallis was thinking of his response, he saw that Louie had already entered the bookstore.

He gritted his teeth and hurriedly transformed into his pigeon form and flew onto the roof of the bookstore. At that moment, he managed to catch a glimpse of Louie’s shadow form that had swiftly camouflaged himself within the shadows between the bookshelves.

But shortly after, the shadows there seemed to swell up...

It was as if someone was struggling violently within.

—

Inside the bookstore, Lin Jie was pondering.

Since the journal appeared in the Lower District of Norzin and came into my hands, it means that the owner of the journal had come into contact with this other world. His research isn’t false; the contents of his journal are truthful apart from the ramblings.

Because of my first impressions and Azir’s period of lost culture, I’ve

never thought about why a completely different and foreign world would also be using the same Chinese characters and English words as their main languages.

Moreover, the details and language structure were exactly the same as Earth.

Therefore...

Lin Jie stared at the blood-stained journal fixedly. My subjective consciousness was tampered with since I transmigrated over?

It was as though his language settings had been adjusted to “Chinese (Simplified).”

Upon refreshing, it had immediately ‘translated’ the garbled characters into a language that he could understand.

And there had only been one such existence capable of performing what seemed like miraculous ‘feats’ to ordinary beings while having constantly ‘supported’ Lin Jie...

Blackie?

Find the original at Hosted Novel.

Lin Jie raised his brow and subconsciously looked over Theodore’s shoulder, at the space between the bookshelves. The shadow in the narrow and slightly slanted gap trembled, and soon after, a dark, blurry shadow of a torso appeared.

It was as if there was an invisible person standing there.

At that very moment, the shadow nodded politely, then raised a hand and waved.

Just like it was trying to say, ‘You’re welcome.’

I see... So, this is all a part of transmigrating benefits?

Lin Jie mused for a moment. Having felt that he understood what Blackie was trying to imply, he slightly relaxed.

It made sense... If he had been unable to communicate after transmigrating over, his situation three years ago would have been much direr. Forget about having to make ends meet by selling books; just interacting with other people would have already been a huge problem.

While he wouldn't suffer to the extent of the journal's owner who lacked references and users of the language, resulting in constant dead ends, misconceptions, and not making any progress, it would still take Lin Jie at least more than a year to be able to converse fluently.

In the past, Lin Jie had previously always complained that Blackie was irresponsible for disappearing right after granting his wish and transmigrating him over to this world without so much as explaining the price he had to pay.

This had led Lin Jie to think that the cost of realizing his wish was to be 'exiled in this other world.'

Yet, he hadn't imagined that 'after sales service' had already been provided.

I have wronged you, Blackie!

And when Lin Jie put more thought into it, he realized that the languages of Earth and Azir were different, which also meant that his customers couldn't have understood any of the books that he had brought over.

Yet, the fact was that they not only understood but were able to have discussions with Lin Jie about them...

What did this imply?

This meant that Blackie hadn't just modified Lin Jie's lingual system, but also conveniently adjusted the words displayed in his books, allowing people from this foreign world to understand them, thereby making it possible for Lin Jie to sell them.

That's really thoughtful...

Lin Jie came to a sudden comprehension and gave a slight heartwarming smile.

But why does it seem like Blackie appears to be slightly fatter?

Chapter 289: Hes Smiling!

Chapter 289: He's Smiling!

Table of Contents

Next Chapter (Teaser) ?

Wallis in his pigeon form trembled violently. The strangely frightening scene he just witnessed made him flap his wings in panic and he had nearly fallen down.

Louie had managed to successfully sneak into the bookshop rather quickly. He hadn't made any movements yet and, as usual, lurked in the shadows of the bookshelves.

This was routine, and no problems had arisen during this process.

The bookstore owner was focused on reading a book behind the counter and didn't seem to notice the intruder at all.

It was quite normal for a 'shadow assassin' to have such a successful and perfect infiltration.

After all, the art of assassinations were their specialty.

Even their physiques had been modified, allowing them to become umbra creatures. Usually, even Destructive-rank beings wouldn't be able to detect their existence, but for someone at Louie's level, as long as he didn't make a move, he could even hide from a Supreme-rank.

These 'shadow bugs' nurtured by the Path of the Flaming Sword were the highest-ranking lackeys in the organization's periphery. They were responsible for running communications with the lower-level members and doing all the secret dirty work.

This includes taking in and testing prospective recruits who wanted to join the organization as well as undertaking assassinations on behalf of the organization.

Wallis was introduced to this organization by none other than the current head of the Sapir Clan, 'Wolf King' Hoffman.

Indeed. The head of the Sapir Clan was also a member of the Path of the Flaming Sword.

Wallis was a trusted aide of Hoffman's and was naturally loyal to the old patriarch. Thus, he was temporarily accompanied by this shadow assassin to undertake an evaluation mission as any new member needed.

With Hoffman as a guarantee, Wallis' mission was basically no-brainer.

It was merely taking a special book from an ordinary secondhand bookseller, and the only thing of concern were other transcendent beings that were coveting the same book.

According to Wallis, none of them were a match for him, let alone his unfathomable shadow assassin partner, Louie.

This was a task as simple as taking candy from a baby!

...At first, this was how it ought to be.

But what happened next was something that Wallis would never forget.

And it all happened in an instant.

Louie had merged into the shadows between the shelves and Wallis' wings hadn't yet come to a halt; his pigeon feet had barely landed on the eaves.

Via his pigeon eyes, Wallis saw the still deeper darkness within the shadow seemingly burst forth.

Just as if it were a spider waiting silently for its prey, springing forth the moment a delicious meal falls into its web, capturing and devouring it.

A vague humanoid figure appeared to struggle wildly within the

shadow and the whole patch of darkness writhed and rose as if it were boiling water.

It was Louie, and he was trying to escape—Wallis knew this for certain.

Only an umbra creature could do damage to another umbra creature in the shadows.

He must have surely felt that he would be out of danger if only he could get out of the shadow and return to normal human form.

But regardless of how the imperious shadow assassin struggled and twisted with all his might, even if the flat shadows raised and warped, Louie wasn't able to get out of the mire-like shadow.

Countless long shadow tentacles emerged all around, plunging into the humanoid shadow, twisting it, swallowing it...

Support us at Hosted Novel.

All without a squeak.

Then, the shadow went still again as if nothing had happened, except that it had suddenly grown a little larger.

.

The immersion was so great that Wallis could already sense Louie's utter despair.

And at that moment, the bookstore owner who had been absorbed in studying the journal suddenly turned his gaze to the shadow in the middle of the shelves and gave a creepy smile that implied a great deal.

Accompanying that smile were those deep, dark eyes that were like a frightening abyss that would devour one's soul.

He realized it right from the beginning!!!

Our plans, our tracks, Louie's infiltration and objective—he has a grasp

on it all! He's literally waiting for him to get caught!!!

He's smiling, he's smiling! He's laughing at our ignorance!

How terrifying, this bookstore owner is as terrible as those rumors say. He doesn't reveal emotion and can slaughter Supreme-ranks as easily as cutting grass.

No, no. I have to run quickly, otherwise it will be too late!

The Path of the Flaming Sword, shadow assassins—they're all false, false!

The pigeon on the eave seemed to slip and lose its footing, then spread its wings with a panicky cooing and flew away without looking back...

Theodore sat nervously at the counter, awaiting the bookstore owner's final evaluation on the book that had caused so much trouble.

If even this last hope was not enough to help him... Theodore reckoned he would meet a sad end soon.

At his most desperate and anxious moments, he did consider taking the initiative to hand the book over to those people.

But logic had kept him from doing so.

Theodore wasn't a fool. As a secondhand bookseller for many years, he had crossed paths with many people with power and authority.

Those who stand above ordinary folks would never allow those who know of their secrets to live when it is in their own interests.

If Theodore were to expose himself and hand the book over to those people, he would never again see the light of day.

Thus, it was a desperate decision for Theodore to show the book to this fellow bookstore owner of sorts.

He waited in silence for about 20 minutes.

At first, he was very uneasy and kept fidgeting in his seat. But then, with Lin Jie's slow, gentle turning of the pages, for some strange reason, Theodore calmed down.

At least... This young bookstore owner took my request seriously. Even if he has no way of helping me, I have no regrets, for I have met a good man.

And, from Mr. Lin's eyes, it appears as if he can actually read these words... Who knows, perhaps it might work?

Theodore held on to this glimmer of expectation, but Lin Jie suddenly looked up at him.

No... He looked behind him and gave a vague smile.

"Um, Mr. Lin... What's the matter?"

Theodore glanced behind but saw nothing.

Lin Jie shook his head and replied, "It's nothing much. I just remembered something funny. By the way, I will probably need to study your book for some time. Could you leave it here with me? I'll return it to you in a few days."

Theodore was overjoyed. Leaving the book here meant that the bookstore owner had promised to help him.

He nodded at once. "Of course. If you want, I can even give you the book."

Lin Jie chuckled. "You don't have to go to that extent... Huh?"

He suddenly paused as he sensed Whitey getting restless in his arms. He looked down and saw the chubby cat's look of eagerness.

Lin Jie followed Whitey's gaze and noticed a gray pigeon outside the window flapping its wings as it took to the sky.

Slightly surprised, he petted Whitey's head. "You want to eat that?"

Chapter 290: It's Impossible For The Pigeon To Be Here

Chapter 290: It's Impossible For The Pigeon To Be Here

Lin Jie stroked his chin as he watched the pigeon flying away. *That pigeon does seem rather fat, doesn't it?*

No wonder Whitey is still so restless even though Mu'en has been feeding it cat food every day. Looks like the food at home can't compare to outside food. What a greedy cat.

It's in a cat's nature to catch birds. After all, playing with the cat teaser is a similar act... Mhmm, that makes sense.

Lin Jie's eyes fell on the cat teaser stick that he had just placed aside.

It's all my fault. Seems like my own creation of this cat teaser triggered Whitey's intrinsic nature.

He stroked Whitey's fur and sighed, trying his best to persuade his pet, "Ah, that's also a little life right there. Isn't there cat food for you at home, Whitey? Don't you have enough to eat? And your fur is all white..."

Meow~~~

Whitey turned around and cautiously placed his two fluffy paws on Lin Jie's arms. It then plucked up the courage to look up and call out softly.

Those clear, buttery, sad little eyes were full of chagrin and longing.

It perfectly portrayed the image of a clever yet mischievously cute little cat.

Look at how I've worked chasing after that cat stick. Just let me eat that delicious-smelling fellow as well as his companion that's rushing over —

was what Whitey was trying to imply.

As a cat lover, Lin Jie's heart melted.

It was just a pigeon. How could he not give his child what it wanted?

"Oh, alright then..." His words of persuasion stopped at his lips. With a slight sigh, he pinched Whitey's paw and said, "Go out and have fun. I'll ask Mu'en to go look for you later. Remember not to stray too far."

Lin Jie felt as though he was the 'caring mother' worried for his child that was traveling somewhere far away. Regardless of whether Whitey understood him or not, he would let Mu'en know about this and have her keep an eye on the little cat.

Also, based on how it acted most of the time, Whitey seemed rather intelligent. Therefore, the little cat must have been able to understand its master's concern at the moment.

Meow!

Whitey's eyes lit up, and it licked the back of Lin Jie's hand, indicating that it agreed.

Then, it jumped down happily, pushed the door open, and ran out of the store to hunt down the fleeing pigeon.

Theodore was stunned when he saw this. *As expected of a person that can even make Rolle Resource Development's young miss lower her status for a humble visit. Even the cat he raised is different from others. So intelligent...*

While he was marveling at the pet cat, a sudden recollection of a pigeon fluttering frantically outside the window just moments ago crossed his mind.

He hadn't thought much of it at first, but due to the cat's actions, even the appearance of the pigeon had become so distinct. As a result, he had a sudden look of doubt on his face.

Because in that scene flashing across his mind, that pigeon had a pair of eyes that were full of emotion, even somewhat human-like...

At this moment, Lin Jie suddenly turned back to Theodore and smiled. "Let's continue our conversation. I apologize, my pet was being a little mischievous."

He paused for a moment before asking, "Oh, by the way, Theodore, did you just move here recently? Did you see any newly opened pigeon farms or a spot where pigeons gather to be fed? It's rare to see such a sleek, plump pigeon in the wild."

Lin Jie had started to suspect that this pigeon was being raised on someone's farm or was an escaped pet pigeon. If that were so, this might pose a slightly troublesome problem.

Theodore froze when he heard these words and replied in a daze, "No..."

Wait... That's right!

He had investigated the surrounding neighborhood before moving here out of habit. There were no pigeon farms along the street, nor were there any places to feed pigeons due to the density of buildings. Also, there weren't many trees because of the last large gas explosion.

That was why it was basically impossible for pigeons raised by humans to appear in this area!

That pigeon... Something's not right!

Theodore looked at Lin Jie, saw the smile on his face, and suddenly understood what it meant—The bookstore owner was giving him a reminder.

Where did this pigeon, which shouldn't be here, come from?

Theodore recalled his experience a few days ago. No memory was more vivid than the man who had suddenly turned into an eagle around the street corner... Since he could become an eagle, he could certainly turn into a pigeon.

That's right!

Those blood-red eyes! Those are by no means the eyes of a gentle pigeon!

Yes. Those eyes weren't just the eyes of the pigeon but also the eyes of the man that turned into an eagle...

That pigeon is one of them! They're coming!

This novel is available on Hosted Novel.

Theodore immediately started getting anxious. *They're coming for me, for my life and the notebook. Perhaps, I will never be able to escape, after all...*

The mysterious powers that had troubled him for so many days had once again appeared unhindered before him.

Wait a moment, unhindered? No. Wait, there's the cat!

Theodore felt as if a bolt of lightning had struck his mind, connecting everything that had just happened together which both shocked and enlightened him.

The pigeon came, but there was only one reason it had fled in a hurry—these people had met an even more powerful existence and were afraid.

So that's why... No wonder this cat raised by Mr. Lin seems so smart. I'm sure that it can turn into a person just like that eagle and pigeon. Or in other words... it's a morphed person.

That's no pet. It's an underling of yours, right?

Theodore felt that he had gotten a peek into the mysterious and dangerous 'inner world.'

Lin Jie felt relieved when he heard Theodore's words. "No, huh? Seems like it didn't come from anywhere nearby. That's not gonna be a problem then..."

If this pigeon wasn't from the area, no one would have any idea if it was owned by someone.

I don't know anything, and my cat doesn't either. It's purely accidental if the pigeon is eaten, so there is no need for compensation.

Mr. Lin coughed to cover up the dark thoughts he had. Then, he returned his attention to Theodore, acting as if nothing had happened, and said with a smile, "Since there aren't any feeding grounds for pigeons here, it must probably be a wild one. It doesn't matter if it's eaten. Am I right, Mr. Theodore?"

There would be absolutely no problem once the only witness was settled.

Theodore gave a look of understanding and nodded. "Of course, I agree with you."

His unease came to a rest as he thought to himself, *Mr. Lin is a decisive man indeed. He dealt with those people as soon as I asked for his help and they ran away immediately. It seems that Mr. Lin has rather extraordinary power and status in this 'inside world.'*

Father's words were right. I have to trust my intuition.

Wallis flapped his wings frantically as he fled the scene as fast as he could. He had even used all the speed augmentation magic he had learned throughout his life and was hundreds of streets away in an instant.

However, the further he got, the greater the impending sense of danger he felt.

"Wallis, what are you doing? Where's Louie?"

A shadow appeared beside him abruptly. It was another of their shadow assassins that came to pick him up.

Chapter 291: The World Today Isn't Safe

Chapter 291: The World Today Isn't Safe

What am I doing? Running for my life, of course!

Louie is already as dead as a door-nail. I have no time to entertain your meaningless questions! Don't block my way!

—That was what Wallis really wanted to say.

But the other party had a higher rank in the Path of the Flaming Sword and was also much stronger.

Wallis wouldn't have to run for his life anymore if he said all that upfront... Because he would be buried on the spot.

Thus, he could only hold his words and revert back to his original form and landed in a corner.

Find the original at Hosted Novel.

He took extra care when descending, fearfully avoiding the spots with shadows and deliberately standing in full sunlight.

Evidently, the scene from before had traumatized him.

Being completely exposed under the sunlight like this was very uncomfortable for Wallis, who had always lived in the darkness as a wanted criminal till now.

However, compared to his personal safety, this discomfort was nothing much at all.

He didn't want to end up just like Louie, who had slipped into the shadows and died a very strange and unnatural death...

However, even if it was like this now, the foreboding sense of dread

that Wallis felt was getting stronger by the minute which was something he just couldn't understand.

He had clearly fled that terrifying bookstore using his fastest possible methods and hadn't come into contact with any shadows, so why didn't he feel the least bit safe at all?

It must be because I haven't gotten far enough, damn it! All because this person suddenly cut in and blocked the way. I've to deal with her quickly, otherwise things will get much worse!

Wallis thought about it and chose to speak. "Reporting, Madam Pasha. Our target brought the book into the 'bookstore' and most likely got the protection of the 'owner.' I'm afraid that the mission difficulty has to be re-evaluated. I could only retreat temporarily, but Sir Louie... He's already dead."

From the shadows came an extremely shocked voice. "He's dead?"

The pitch-black shadow transformed into a woman in the same tight, black outfit that Louie wore. She took two steps forward, her incredulous gaze tinged with a chilling anger.

"Bookstore? What are you talking about? He is just a mortal! Other than a Supreme-rank, no one can kill a shadow assassin in the shadows! Unless Louie didn't enter his stealth mode and engaged the opponent head on, a fight isn't something that he can't handle.

"And... if he's dead, why are you still alive?"

Pasha was menacing as she advanced, as if she was suspecting Wallis of lying or simply defecting.

"Because that guy is also a Supreme-rank at the very least!"

At first, Wallis felt somewhat crushed by Pasha's 'incessant badgering' but then came to the realization that she didn't understand which 'bookstore' he was referring to. She had assumed that he had been talking about Theodore's secondhand bookstore!

"No! No! It's 'that bookstore'! The one that had no name!"

Wallis explained incoherently, but at this point, he felt something severely off. Information about that bookstore was said to be sealed off and other powers might not know about it.

However, there was no reason why the Path of the Flaming Sword didn't know...

Why didn't the organization just tell us that Theodore had moved near that bookstore and there was a possibility of coming in contact with that frightening being?

How could they just send a bunch that can't even fight head-on against a Destructive-rank to just die?

But time was of the essence, and Wallis' only thought right now was to escape quickly and not dwell on it.

These thoughts he had were fleeting, but Wallis threw them to the back of his mind in an instant.

"And the enemy had a special means of dealing with umbra creatures and already knew for quite some time that we would be taking action today. There was already an ambush set up, so when Sir Louie entered, he was caught unawares by a trap. I saw him being swallowed by the shadow with my own eyes!

"The opponent must have the ability to harness the power of umbra creatures. Madam Pasha, let's leave... No, let's run! It will be too late if we don't go now!"

Wallis was already breaking out in cold sweat as he said this as he hurriedly took a few steps backward for fear of accidentally coming into contact with Pasha's body.

These shadow assassins that had been transformed into umbra creatures were now, in his opinion, no different from a walking bomb.

If that scary being unleashed the same ability and directly took out Pasha, Wallis didn't want to be buried alongside her as well!

Pasha's livid look lightened up for a bit. She vaguely sensed that something was amiss too.

The anxious and panicked look of Wallis wasn't fake, but he did not seem to be just in fear of someone catching up but more afraid of herself...

A means of harnessing umbra creatures?

No, this could also be an excuse. There could be another reason for this fear... A guilty conscience.

Pasha was still judging the truth of Wallis' words because she couldn't believe that Louie would die...

She weighed her options and said coldly, "Never-mind, I'll believe you, for now. Let's leave—"

Meow~

A soft purr interrupted Pasha abruptly.

"!"

Wallis had only just exhaled and he suddenly choked. His heart pounded madly as he turned his head stiffly to see a chubby white cat strolling over from the intersection.

The way this cat walked was adorable; its innocent yet cute face made it seem like just a passing kitty.

Pasha had merely raised her eyebrows, but beside her, Wallis was already in full panic and turning to run.

That was the cat he caught a glimpse of in the bookstore, the one cradled in the arms of the bookstore owner!

It had chased after him!

As if he had seen an evil spirit, Wallis' face twisted with fear as he exclaimed, "No, don't!"

Pasha was alerted and immediately drew out the two black blades strapped to her back and unsheathed the dozens of daggers on the leather harness at the same time. Without a moment's hesitation, they shot toward the cat, carrying the power and poison of the shadows, cutting a beautiful arc in the air.

Swoosh swoosh swoosh—

Pasha uttered an incantation, activating the technique etched to those daggers.

Everything happened in the blink of an eye, and Pasha's reaction speed was undoubtedly worthy of a shadow assassin.

Any ordinary Destructive-rank here would surely have to pay some attention to deal with this move and would be delayed for some time.

Unfortunately, she was facing an embryonic form that had once stolen the power of a false god.

The daggers hit true and plunged into the body of that white cat, and the dozens of blades sucked to the surface made it seem like a hedgehog.

However, no blood was drawn.

The white cat's form was cut by the daggers, turning it into a strange shape. But then, it opened its mouth, revealing countless tentacles and eyes writhing inside before the whole radial burst out, expanding several hundred times over, flattening all constructs in the surroundings and turning the entire area into a huge 'lair' that covered all.

Meow~

It opened its huge inner eye and smiled wryly at the two prey before letting out a soft, strange purr.

—

"Um, Mu'en, Whitey went outside to play and try to catch a pigeon.

Go look after White later on and don't let it run far. Be careful, lest it be abducted by someone."

After seeing Theodore out, Lin Jie called out to his assistant with a sigh. "The world today isn't safe."

The young lady glanced at him and gave an expressionless nod.

Chapter 292: Lin Jie's Father

Chapter 292: Lin Jie's Father

“Oh right,” Lin Jie suddenly called out to Mu'en just as she was about to leave. He rummaged under the counter and took out a white wool scarf.

Grinning at Mu'en, he added, “It's almost winter, but fortunately, I have this scarf that was just washed recently. You should use it for now; I'll take you to buy a new one in the next few days.

“The temperature has been dipping. You'll be fine in the store, but do be careful when you're outside.”

Mu'en backtracked and stood before the counter obediently. As she reached over to take the scarf, she was shocked by the soft and fluffy sensation.

It would appear the scarf's texture resembled Whitey's fur, albeit much softer and warmer.

The girl cautiously prodded at the object.

Seeing Mu'en's frozen in confusion, Lin Jie palmed his forehead and said, “I forgot you've never used this kind of scarf before. Come now, lower your head.”

He lifted the wool scarf from Mu'en's arms and leaned across the counter to drape it over Mu'en's neck, finishing it with a neat bow.

“All done.”

The satisfied Lin Jie made the final adjustments on the position of the scarf. He assessed the young girl before him that had evolved into 'Mu'en: Winter Edition.' Most of her petite face was buried into the puffy white wool scarf, making her look even smaller than usual.

Mu'en tilted her head and curiously rubbed the tip of the nose

around the edges of the scarf. She could feel her warmth trapped within the scarf, heating up her body.

“Scarfs are amazing. Putting on a scarf in winter is basically adding on an extra layer,” Lin Jie said.

Mu'en only gave a nod of contemplation.

Lin Jie smiled and patted the girl's head. “Alright, you can go now. A frivolous pet like Whitey often attracts unwanted attention. The resulting pros will far outweigh the cons if it were to be taken by someone.

“Not to mention the freaks of this society; if they happen to dislike cats, think of the atrocities they may commit. Whitey is always in danger when it is outside.”

Mu'en gave a hum of acknowledgment before heading out and closing the door behind her.

Lin Jie saw her off with a wave before he exhaled sharply and his smile gradually faded. Returning to his seat, he picked up the diary once again and flipped it open.

His eyes stopped on the page with blood splattered across the names of ‘Professor Lin’ and ‘Professor Zhang’ amongst a few others.

Lin Jie had paid close interest to this ‘Professor Lin’ since the very beginning, mainly because of having the same family name as well as the professor's apparent role as the leader of this ill-fated archaeological expedition.

The information in this notebook is still largely incomplete. Based on these journal entries, the owner of this notebook appears to be slightly distant with the professor as the interactions between them are far and few.

He was just an ordinary member of the archaeological team that ultimately was only responsible for his job and was among the lucky few to have survived for an extended period of time. Without access to the goal of the expedition, the owner of the journal was clueless of the

purpose behind their research.

Before his transmigration here, Lin Jie had never heard of anything relating to the topic at hand, further proving that it was indeed a dead end.

This did seem rather reasonable: the entire archaeological team had all been wiped out, and the construction team and research facility above the ground would have probably suffered as well. Would anyone in their right mind have wanted to continue on?

But before delving into that, who was backing this archaeological team in the first place?

Was it the research institute mentioned in the journal, or was it some other constituents?

Merely flipping through this journal would never answer any of these questions.

‘Professor Lin’ and ‘Professor Zhang’ appeared to be playing the recurring role of ‘instigators.’ They had chosen to push forward into unknown danger even when half the team was either wounded or dead, seemingly giving no consideration to whether help would arrive.

It was unlikely that there were no problems within the team.

Lin Jie rubbed the coarse paper and had some reservations.
Professor Lin had already accomplished 7 to 8 years of archaeological work even though he was only in his thirties.

Hmm, granted that he survived his previous ordeal, of course...

Lin Jie actually had a vague guess.

Of everyone he knew, there was actually a professor by the name of ‘Lin’ who could perfectly fit all of the criterias above.

The full name of this Professor Lin was Lin Minghai. He graduated from an archaeological course at an overseas prestigious university at a young age, returned home to work after, and was involved in

many major archaeological discoveries.

With his well-embellished resume, he became a prestigious and authoritative professor at the age of 37 and educated countless students.

Aside from the glamorous resume, Professor Lin also held identity with less importance in comparison.

That was, being the father of Lin Jie.

As he looked through the journal, Lin Jie started to mumble to himself, *I remember in his 30s... that accident occurred when he was about 40.*

Lin Minghai, who had accomplished brilliant achievements at such a young age, never participated in any archaeological-related work after hitting his 40s.

The reason was none other than an unfortunate car accident he had when he was 40 which resulted in having both legs amputated and wheelchair-bound for life.

Find the original at Hosted Novel.

His 8-month pregnant wife whom he had been married to for less than two years passed away after just barely managing to give birth.

Such a big blow sent him spiraling downwards. With a deteriorating mental state, Lin Minghai could still maintain a normal lifestyle initially, but the gradual loss of his sanity led to him eventually choosing suicide when Lin Jie was only 13.

He'd left the gas on after consuming some sleeping pills.

Lin Jie was certain that he lacked any remaining ties in his old world when he had transmigrated. And Lin Minghai had definitely played a huge role in that mindset.

Choosing folklore studies as his specialization and gaining a bout of practical experience from such a young age was also largely

influenced by his father.

Sadly, due to Lin Minghai's mental instability, Lin Jie didn't have a clear picture of his father's past experiences. Whatever information he had was mostly gathered from his father's former students, which weren't very comprehensive. Till date, Lin Jie himself barely remembered much about his father either.

"The professor already had some mental issues in the past. Professor Zhang was the psychiatrist in charge of him at that time and they promptly wed after."

These were words often heard by Lin Jie when those already successful people came to console him.

Lin Jie could only sighed as he recalled this.

Yes, Professor Zhang. Lin Minghai had tied the knot with the psychiatrist in charge of him just two years after he became a professor. And the name of this psychiatrist was Zhang Caiyong.

Professor Lin, Professor Zhang. Now it all seemed to get clearer.

Lin Jie rested his chin over his interlocking fingers out of habit as he stared at the journal. *They frequently mentioned a car accident, and I've already confirmed it by investigating it on the sly; there were even hospitalization records.*

It's either a coincidence or someone deliberately covering it up.

The only clue lies in the only other person whose full name has been written in this journal.

...Professor Lin's student, Duan Xuemin!

Lin Jie shut his eyes. He had seen the old student yearbooks in his house; there were a few whose surnames began with 'Duan,' about a handful. However, he could barely remember their names.

Student Duan.

Journal.

Lin Jie shut the journal and turned to its cover page.

He recalled where he had seen this notebook.

Chapter 293: Mantis Stalks The Cicada

Chapter 293: Mantis Stalks The Cicada

Shendu Archaeological Institute of Cultural Relics.

Lin Jie slowly modulated aether to scrape the blood-stains and dirt caking the cover of the notebook that had formed a ‘shell.’

He wasn’t used to utilizing such aether; he was still an ordinary person after all and didn’t have many opportunities to use it.

Lin Jie just constantly accumulated aether during his time in the dream realm when asleep. Like a chipmunk with its acorn stash, this provided him with a rather inexplicable sense of security.

The ‘shell’ gradually started to chip from the ‘chiseling’ of the formless aether, and tiny bits fell all over the counter-top.

At the bottom left corner of the journal’s cover, some words previously hidden by the dirt started to take shape.

Fwoo.

Lin Jie blew away the clippings on the table, revealing a ‘fresh’ journal.

Despite passing hands from the Lower District smuggler to Theodore, not a previous custodian of the journal had thought to scrape off the filthy ‘shell’ of the notebook.

An inherent lack of time was a possibility, though it could also be because they thought it unnecessary.

Of course, they could have been unwilling to attempt it as they lacked the skill set.

Usually, the restoration of ancient relics ought to be done with the

usage of specific tools. However, Lin Jie was neither at home nor at school, and the only usable tool he had at his disposal was a screwdriver... which definitely shouldn't be used on such a delicate book.

As such, Lin Jie could only rely on the accumulated aetheric energy that he himself had nearly forgotten as a substitute for the professional tools required to clean the journal up.

And looking at the results, the process had gone smoothly.

"Shendu Archaeological Institute of Cultural Relics... It's indeed this institution that gives participants of their archaeology seminars journals as souvenirs."

We are Hosted Novel, find us on google.

It finally dawned on Lin Jie why the book appeared so familiar.

Because he himself owned a notebook of the exact same design, complete with the complementary fountain pen which came with it.

Although he majored in folklore studies because of his family's 'academic roots,' those people that came to his house when he was young were mostly people that studied archaeology and history. Through prolonged exposure, Lin Jie's knowledge of archaeology was pretty extensive.

As aforementioned, Lin Jie would be dragged to help the school's neighboring archaeology department whenever they lacked manpower.

Similarly, those who respected the late Professor Lin had always pinned their sympathies on Lin Jie and hoped for Lin Jie to take over Lin Minghai's 'mantle.'

They would often drag Lin Jie to participate in a multitude of academic seminars, or straight up just bring him to archaeological dig sites.

Nevertheless, Lin Jie still showed no interest in any of it. He disliked conducting research on the dead and ancient; instead, he

preferred something he could appreciate firsthand, such as the culture of living humans in today's world.

Moreover, those expectant gazes weren't technically directly cast at him.

So, why would he try to please these people?

Of course, Lin Jie wasn't dull either, and he obviously wouldn't voice out his inner thoughts so casually. He would still attend those seminars, though it was mostly done as subterfuge.

Moreover, the seminar hosted by Shendu Archaeological Institute of Cultural Relics was a rather insignificant event that Lin Jie had attended.

The notebook would afterwards be kept alongside Lin Jie's other souvenirs, never to be touched again.

"I never imagined such an outcome, seeing this type of notebook again in this other world."

Gazing at the blurred inscribed words on the cover, Lin Jie couldn't really describe the emotions he was going through as he tapped a finger on his forehead.

"The director of that institute seemed to have the surname Duan. Someone had once introduced him as a student of Lin Minghai. He did seem to have worked in Shendu for some time, but this Director Duan never visited, not even showing up during the funeral.

"So, it would seem like these two had a rather ordinary relationship.

"If I had bothered to dig deeper back then, perhaps I would've been able to know whether that Director Duan was the Duan Xueming mentioned in this journal."

Lin Jie shook his head and continued with his rambling, "Yet, with this specific type of notebook, the Shendu Archaeological Institute of Cultural Relics must be linked to this whole event. It may very well have been the research institute mentioned within the entries.

“There’s only one problem. What if the owner of this journal had, like me, only obtained the notebook from some past random seminar.”

Urgh.

Lin Jie sighed. Squeezing out the truth from such a dingy notebook was proving to be very difficult.

There were still many uncertain elements and key points lacking. According to Theodore’s statement and Lin Jie’s own judgment, the notebook seemed to be over a hundred years old.

Yet Lin Minghai got into that car accident only 24 years prior.

Supposing he really was leading this archaeology expedition back then, it would mean that time flowed differently on the two sides.

Or perhaps, when he jumped through the ‘door,’ there was a warp in the space-time continuum, sending him to the Lower District from a hundred years ago and leaving behind all that Lin Jie saw now.

“Norzin’s Lower District seems to hide some great secrets... Traces from the Second Era or even earlier should all be there. If so, there may even be some ancient, secret power hidden down below.”

This was yet another reason for Lin Jie to check out the Lower District.

Since the entire team of nearly 30 personnel were ordered to document their experiences, surely this journal wouldn’t be all that remained.

If Lin Jie could obtain the journals of others, he would be one step closer to the truth.

“Moreover, since there’s a language barrier between the two worlds, this notebook would just be a series of illegible scribbles that aren’t worth anything from a ‘local’ point of view.

“But Theodore did mention about the many troubles that arose from

holding on to this journal as well as him being watched.

“This all means that there is a possibility that a group of people have already discovered the value of this notebook in Azir. This would explain the demand for the notebook.

“Understanding everything purely from possessing this notebook seems unlikely, but if I were to make a bold assumption, they may already have other notebooks within their grasp, or perhaps even other objects from Earth.”

A pendant crafted from yellow crystals dangled and swayed slightly in the wind, glimmering as it did so.

“This truly reflects the beauty of the mineral that has been completely depleted on Azir...”

Through the rays refracted off the crystal, Cleveland sighed as he gazed upon the gigantic ‘nest’ in the center which had swallowed two people and had eyes all over it.

“It’s truly unheard of for a juvenile dream creature to display such strength; it must be at least Supreme-rank.”

He pocketed the pendant with a triumphant smile as he sensed the fluctuations in the surrounding boundary. “No wonder Lord Sandalphon had a sudden change of plans. Sacrificing these two pawns to set a trap for obtaining such an exceptional pet was definitely worth it.”

Chapter 294: Unaware Of The Oriole Behind

Chapter 294: Unaware of The Oriole Behind

A colossal monster of flesh and blood spread out several hundred meters in every direction. The massive eyeball in the center cracked open, revealing the inner sarcomas and the pulsating organs laced with blood vessels.

Between the gaps of putrid flesh, tentacles which resembled white strips of light flailed around, piercing the two helpless human figures and strangling them. Copious amounts of blood were squeezed from them before they were promptly engulfed.

The now slurried human figures were shadow assassin Pasha and druid Wallis.

Search Hosted Novel for the original.

They were food to this gigantic monster and had been ‘pinched’ into bizarre shapes as if they were soft bread by this ravenous creature that had no regard for the feelings of its food.

Wallis’ eyes were barely remaining in their sockets, and the end of the golden wolf head staff that he held had been plunged into his chest from the other end. His half-wolf form twisted into a licorice shape, and his spine was completely exposed. The only signs of struggle were the slight incessant twitching of whatever remained of his nerves.

In the face of the juvenile Destructive-rank pseudo-god, Wallis simply had no way of putting up the slightest resistance. Even his transformation attempt was half-complete, cut short with his swift death.

Whitey widened its jaw and gobbled the ‘pigeon’ in a few bites; it was so small it could be barely considered a snack.

In contrast, Pasha, who was stronger, managed to remain conscious. Her eyes were fixated on the monster before her as a mix of dread and anger filled her face.

The disgusting protrusions surrounding her displayed obvious signs of toxin corrosion, puffing out wisps of blue and black smoke. Bits and pieces dissolved into bouts of pus, while multiple tentacles and limbs began breaking off and fell twitching to the ground. The multitude of densely-packed eyes on the detached extremities was blinking relentlessly, producing sharp bursts of “squeaking” noises. It was as if all of them were separate individuals with independent consciousness.

This was the damage caused by Pasha’s attacks; direct proof that this shadow assassin was not to be underestimated.

Moreover, her modified umbra physique had greatly boosted her vitality, allowing her to remain alive despite her entire body being torn apart.

But unfortunately, this only served to extend her suffering.

Targets of shadow assassins were usually human, hence their methods were often as such.

Had the target of Pasha’s attacks been a powerful human, he or she would have likely been dead.

But alas, to the gigantic juvenile pseudo-god, all that these toxins did was cause some ‘tingling pain’ to its ‘arms.’

Is this the thing that killed Louie?

Pasha struggled helplessly, her vision blurring, and it became extremely difficult for her to breathe. Strength in both her arms were gradually slipping away as absolute despair came over her. She was just unable to fathom this truth.

No. No Way. How could the organization not provide such information to us carrying out this mission when such an entity was this close? The organization is a transcendent one that knows everything, even the truth of the world; how could they possibly not know of the existence of such

a powerful and hideous monster?

There must have definitely been a motive if they knew yet refused to reveal it. And that motive was to send us here intentionally to cause tension with the bookstore and lure the monster into showing itself.

Pasha's eyes widened as it all became clear.

With dying breath, she stared beyond the bloody tentacles which were about to 'finish' her off. She could make out the humanoid floating in midair, as well as his familiar face.

It had been this person that had conveyed the task to her, Louie, and Wallis. The very same higher-up that was here to complete the new recruit evaluation.

He wore a cold yet confident expression, eyes focused on the enormous monster, barely batting an eyelid at the struggling organization members in their death throes.

So this is how the final bit of my life is snuffed out , thought Pasha as the corners of her mouth curved ever so slightly to display her abrupt gratification.

This was all part of the organization's plan; the organization is all-knowing! My death shall be a sharp blade providing my final contribution to the organization! My life has its value!

This is great.

Cleveland showed no interest in the shadow assassin who was smiling despite her imminent death.

They were the products of failed experimentation that were meant to be used like disposable tools.

Who would ever care whether these shadow bugs lived or died?

The only thing he paid attention to right now was the gigantic creature before him. Having sacrificed these two pieces to study the results and closely observe the aftermath, Cleveland's fascination with the monster only grew stronger.

“Even the combination of toxins created from ‘Voice of Doom’ and ‘Chalice of Blood’ wasn’t able to effectively cause any damage. This toxin held by the shadow bug is supposedly more than capable of reducing a high-level Destructive-rank into pus, yet all it did was cause a few tentacles of this dream beast to break off. Its structure is truly incredible!”

There was a crazed look of avarice on Cleveland’s face. If he could analyze the anatomy of this powerful dream beast, he could perhaps develop an even more powerful tool.

Nobody knew about the might of those toxins better than Cleveland, for he created them after all.

Cleveland, who people knew as ‘Poison Master,’ was both a white magician and scholar. As a white magician, his peak combat ability was only at Pandemonium-rank. But, as a scholar, he might have very well been of Destructive-rank.

The majority of biological and medicinal experiments in the Path of the Flaming Sword were largely overseen by him.

Some of which included the Penumbral Bio-modification Experiment which created the shadow bugs, as well as synthesizing ‘Voice of Doom’ and other similar toxins.

And those necessary installations and materials were actually provided by Raziel’s side.

Logically speaking, Cleveland should be under Raziel. But “Guide” Sandalphon was responsible for recruiting new high-ranking members as well as maintaining connections between the other nine ‘angels,’ all of whom had their own subordinates. Many high-ranking executives were accepted by her; they were very close to her as well and would hence willingly follow her dispatch.

Cleveland was one of such.

Originally, the plan was just to retrieve the mysterious notebook that had been smuggled out of the Lower District. This was a relatively easy mission, yet Sandalphon had sent two shadow bugs

to escort them.

This was all because the notebook was reportedly connected to the origins of the Path of the Flaming Sword, hence making the organization pay special attention to it.

However, for some unfathomable reason, that mortal visited the 'bookstore.'

Due to this, the plan had seen an unexpected change, and it became a probing mission.

Now, Lord Sandalphon had ordered him to collect the results.

"The array that was set up ahead of time works perfectly. Supreme-rank sigils are truly powerful. Looks like this little kitty still doesn't know that it has stepped into a trap and gotten stuck."

Cleveland squinted his eyes and observed the dark runic sigils that had been nailed in advance at five corners. The dark violet runes suspended in the air, vaguely forming a cage with a radius of nearly a kilometer.

The unknowing monster was still enjoying its food, oblivious to its impending doom.

Ha, the rumored godly bookstore owner isn't much at all... In the face of a true Supreme-rank like Lord Sandalphon, this 'omniscient' title is just a mere ruse to deceive others.

Cleveland truly thought so, the corners of his lips curling into a snide smile.

Then, he stopped abruptly in his tracks.

Because a streak of moonlight appeared in front of him.

Why is there moonlight here?

This was the last thought Cleveland had as his vision dissolved into nothingness. His raised hands, arms, and lastly, his body—all gradually dissipated into soft moonlight and dissolved in the air.

Within the moonlight, a reserved young girl stared silently at what was left of him, her eyes devoid of any emotion.

[Ability: Source Death]

Chapter 295: Mu'En Now Understood

Chapter 295: Mu'en Now Understood

Mu'en reached out her hand and collected the moonlight that had once been Cleveland.

From her palm, a faint crescent moon appeared wrapped in fog, absorbing all of the light. This made the illusory outline of the moon seem partially more solid, as well as expanding the surface area of the moon.

In just an instant, Cleveland, from his very core, was completely erased from existence without so much as a squeak.

[Source Death] was indeed one of the seven abilities which were rightfully returned to the Moon. It was also the most powerful amongst the seven.

In the hands of apostle Buck from the Church of the Dome, this powerful ability had barely been utilized to a tenth of its true potential. In fact, it was even used by him as a form of "Heresy Trial"; to be used only on the non-believers of the Church of the Dome. It was also only to be used to wipe out human lives, and hence its extent of effectiveness was greatly decreased.

To Mu'en, Buck's moniker of 'Dead Kingdom' was in fact a blatant insult to this ability.

But ever since Mu'en regained the ability, it had once again been returned to its original source, restoring it back to the level it should have.

As the moonlight poured and drifted, a formless wave emanated from the moon within Mu'en's palm. Assisted by the void, all relevant information regarding the individual 'Cleveland' was obliterated.

His life was taken first, followed by any items or traces that could be linked back to him. Examples included the runic sigil formation he had been about to activate, as well as the elixirs and modified humans he had participated in creating. Lastly, his existence, which was acknowledged by other existing entities, was also severed, all done by distorting principles and laws.

However, Mu'en's current power wasn't strong enough as of now, and thus, the ability could only reach the second tier.

The rune sigil array in the surroundings also instantly dissolved into formless moonlight.

If the day came when she could master the final third tier of this ability, it would be the time that marked her ascension to a true Supreme-rank.

Meow?

The monster of flesh, blood, and writhing tentacles let out a shrill cat's purr as it swallowed the last of a leg. Its gigantic eye wriggled slightly and gazed upward to see a familiar individual.

To this descendant of the pseudo-god that had once stolen the power of the Moon, Mu'en was a true Moon Goddess, having an aura it was all too familiar with: gentle and dignified, just like she was its 'Mother.'

Although that unperceivable man was much scarier, this mother-like superior also deserved her rightful awe and respect.

Meow~

As such, despite having no idea about what had unfolded, Whitey still subconsciously let out a teasing purr as it proceeded to tumble forward to face Mu'en.

As a cat, there were times whereby its bloated body shape prevented it from flipping over, and Whitey would always end up stuck midway. But now, when returned to its original form, Whitey could still utilize its tentacles to aid this endeavor. It could now push itself, regardless of its size!

Bam!!

This enormous meatball of a creature proceeded to roll toward Mu'en, flattening buildings and cracking the ground in the process.

Finally, it revealed its 'belly' while its eyes sparkled with an innate desire to be petted.

From Whitey's point of view, it thought itself extremely adorable to the rest of the world. Yet, in the eyes of ordinary people, it was the aftermath of a rather ominous and destructive scene. The humongous eyeball set upon a wicked and cruel gaze, suggestive of the monster's desire to consume people.

Mu'en descended and sighed as she observed the jovial image Whitey was displaying. She reached out her hand and patted the white banded tentacles of Whitey. There was only one thought on her mind right now.

The boss was right, the world is indeed an unsafe place to an innocent pet like Whitey.

There's always some bad people eyeing Whitey, waiting to kidnap and do cruel things to it.

That's why the boss sent me.

Mu'en now understood the boss' intentions.

Whitey was greedy and reckless, whereas the enemy was always scheming in the shadows, waiting for the right opportunity. If Mu'en hadn't made it in time, Whitey would have already been nabbed.

The Boss really treated his pet with care. On one hand, he was unable to resist Whitey's cuteness attack and allowed it to wander off for an extra meal. But at the same time, he also took this opportunity as a means to rid of any intruders with bad intentions toward the bookstore.

On the other hand, he had been worried for Whitey's safety, and hence got Mu'en to follow after, just in case it really got caught.

However, the enemies today aren't ordinary.

Mu'en gazed into the distance.

Though I still have yet to fully master Walpurgis' dream realm to inherit her power, recovering the Moon's authority has allowed my body to transform, allowing me to be a Supreme-rank.

But since I was originally a homunculus, my previous vessel was already defective from the start. If I truly want to be a Supreme-rank, I would first need to fix this defect.

Even so, I am still technically a Supreme-rank, yet I failed to notice the ambush until the Boss mentioned it.

It appears the enemy is a true Supreme-rank, different from Rodney who was forcefully accelerated by someone as well as the pseudo-god that was naturally inferior as its power came from stolen authority.

Mu'en's eyes gradually cleared. She pointed the moonlight within the palm in a certain direction, and it transformed into a spear of light that shot out and streaked across the sky like a shooting star in the direction of the mastermind of this ambush.

She now understood what her boss truly meant. She required real battle to hone her rapidly progressing powers.

At the same time, she was going to take revenge against those who dared to lay a hand on the bookstore's beloved pet and rid of the problem at its root.

Today was destined to be an extraordinary day for members of the Path of the Flaming Sword.

This was a moment that would induce them with an unforgettable fear that would remain with them for the rest of their lives.

Cleveland's colleagues were the first to sense something was wrong. From the researchers who worked on the bio-modification and elixirs to the magicians who researched sigils with him—every

single trace of Cleveland was erased.

Every product of the experiments Cleveland had conducted or participated in disintegrated at that very moment.

Search Hosted Novel for the original.

Shadow assassins on assignment were simultaneously rejected by the shadow realm. Following that, the shadow creatures fused within their bodies had a complete separation. A powerful yet unseen force vigorously pulled apart the two different organisms fused as one. The result was for every cell in their body to lyse, causing the affected beings to implode and turn into a slurry of blood.

This scenario proceeded to occur in nearly two-thirds of all shadow assassins.

Stalkers who were sneering in anticipation for their poison to take effect could no longer do so; magicians preparing to activate sigils they had drawn forgot what they were.

Following the deaths of many members, the operations of the Path of the Flaming Sword were exposed. Any ongoing plans that had yet to be exposed were put on hold as the entire organization plunged into chaos.

Sandalphon was writing a letter.

She wanted to convey Michael's will to the other angels. She wanted the rest of the angels to unite and come with a plan to deal with the bookstore owner that had abruptly emerged.

Sandalphon's pen slid carelessly over the paper. Truth be told, she didn't think this was a good idea.

Because if all ten of them—wait, no, nine of them were to band together, who could possibly stand against them?

This rhetorical question would end up being the anticlimactic

ending of this operation.

Chapter 296: Brood-mother

Chapter 296: Brood-mother

Sandalphon's confidence wasn't without basis.

There were 10 founding members of the Path of the Flaming Sword. Among them were elemental sages from ancient times, powerful magicians, and wise scholars that had led the age of humans to flourish. There was also the founder of the church that had controlled Norzin for thousands of years, right from the beginning of the Third Era.

Every one of them was a Supreme-rank of unrivaled strength.

Those like Gabriel were considered juniors; inferior in every aspect. Still, he was quite useful by establishing the Church of the Dome in the name of the Moon within Norzin.

The Path of the Flaming Sword's rapid growth in Norzin was in part due to the Church of the Dome.

And now it was them who influenced all of Norzin, either official or from the shadows. The powerful organization known as the Path of the Flaming Sword was like a spiderweb, covering and controlling all that was within.

"But because the founders were so powerful and proud, they were still rather scattered even if led by Michael. Despite infiltrating almost all existing organizations, they remained separate and followed different masters.

"Though we might have been overconfident, the flow of intelligence could still be maintained smoothly. But ever since the combined destruction of Gabriel and the Church of the Dome, our greatest information hub was lost, resulting in us only being able to rely on the Truth Union and those shadow bugs.

"Even so, it all fell apart. The Church of the Dome was akin to the

eyes of the Path of the Flaming Sword. While they were but worthless pawns, we can no longer rely on our individual strengths alone, especially if there's that new enemy."

Sandalphon's worry wasn't about the strength of the enemy but rather the internal disorganization within the Path of the Flaming Sword.

While there were some die-hard fanatics within this somewhat lax organization, their loyalties lay with the specific angels they followed. In fact, quite a few mid-ranking members had no clue that there were a total of 10 founding members of the organization.

Now that a large part of their internal connections had been cut, the disarray only continued to grow.

In truth, when the Sun's Faith was first established, the organization's original plan was to send in undercover agents for infiltration and replace the members within in a bid to gain a hold of this new religion.

However, the Sun's Faith had an unknown way of identifying these moles, resulting in them being quickly apprehended and sent to the Secret Rite Tower. The Path of the Flaming Sword could barely collect any internal intelligence this way.

Moreover, according to recent investigations, the Sun's Faith was seemingly connected to Walpurgis, the witch that controlled the night.

This meant that there was a possibility of the Primordial Witches returning!

This was the greatest threat to the Path of the Flaming Sword.

Yet, at the same time, it was also their greatest opportunity!

Compared to the bookstore that had suddenly popped up, the Primordial Witches were still the strongest existences. After all, according to the legends, the entire world was created by them.

Being able to enter the dream realm and return to the real world

again pretty much cemented their ability to freely traverse the dream realm or perhaps create a portal to do so.

The Path of the Flaming Sword wanted to either steal that power for their own or open that portal completely.

“Michael’s letter really came at the nick of time. It’s finally time for the Path of the Flaming Sword to become a united and cohesive organization. Only then will our combined wishes come true.”

Sandalphon assessed the complete piece of the letter in her hand as her eyes twinkled with satisfaction.

“And I shall be the messenger of this grand announcement. I believe the news shall move their hearts, and they will temporarily put their differences aside and accomplish a feat that has never been fulfilled for thousands of years.”

Ever since the creation of the Path of the Flaming Sword, Sandalphon had been in charge of maintaining the internal balance of the organization.

At least before the Church of the Dome’s emergence, she and her underlings were the main contributing factor. Her work was very important, covering the ins and outs of every personnel as well as the flow of information.

“Hehe, just you wait, we will be unstoppable once we arrive. He’s merely Supreme-rank, and if he’s a true god, so what? The Path of the Flaming Sword has killed their fair share of Supreme-ranks in the past, what’s one more?”

Support us at [Hosted Novel](#).

Sandalphon stretched out her dark, slender fingers. A charming yet menacing grin rested on her face that was flawless like a black pearl. Using her sharp and darkened nails, she twisted the loose thread of a dish cloth beside her.

Tiny spiders immediately came scuttling over, hauling away the letters she had finished writing.

Admiring the spiders with dotting eyes, she reached out an arm to pet their bristles. She proceeded to stretch wearily before habitually taking two steps forward.

A loud echo resounded throughout the entire underground cave. Sandalphon's enormous lower 'body,' which was covered with spider silk and rocks, shifted the entire nest. This resulted in numerous cracks forming on the surrounding rock walls.

Sandalphon surveyed the clutter in her nest and cupped her mouth. "Oops, looks like I haven't moved around for quite a while."

She began to flex the joints of all her eight legs and continued forward, stepping off the platform she was originally on.

Rumble!!

Sandalphon had completely detached herself from the rocks and stone, revealing a rather sizable abdomen.

Her upper body was that of a naked and voluptuous female, whereas her lower half was that of a hideous arachnid.

The entire cave began to quake, and shortly after, a few 'tiny people' with dark skin and silver hair emerged from the holes of the rock walls.

They knelt to the ground and cried out in some elven speech: some were bawling their eyes out while others danced with glee, all of them seemingly in a frenzied craze.

These 'tiny people' were indeed dark elves that were cast aside by the world.

And compared to Sandalphon, their bodies were truly miniature. As she stood at the seemingly bottomless cave, the former appeared like an un-scalable mountain.

The angel with the code-name 'Sandalphon' was indeed the "Spider God" that the dark elves worshiped. An existence otherwise known as the 'brood-mother.'

A mythical creature that had existed since the beginning, long before the elves came into existence.

Her level was near equal to the Giant King.

“Speaking of which, where are the little puppets I’ve sent to scout the bookstore? There should be news by now.”

Sandalphon paid no attention to the groveling dark elves and instead tapped her chin with her fingers.

Currently, there weren’t many in the outside world who knew about Sandalphon’s apparent birth in the shadow realm as a shadow creature. Those created shadow bugs could partially be considered her slaves, and she could easily change their will with minimal effort.

However, as she was about to tug the threads to gauge the situation, her face darkened drastically.

She could perceive that the shadow bugs had started to disintegrate uncontrollably!

Not one, not ten, but all of them!

“What’s going on?! Who’s behind this?!”

Sandalphon’s expression was one of absolute disgust. Without any hesitation, she immediately placed her hands on the silk threads and began her intervention.

Just as she connected with one of the shadow bugs, her expression contorted with malevolence.

“How is this possible?! Cause and effect, the power of Law!!”

Chapter 297: Godly Domain

Chapter 297: Godly Domain

“How could there be a Law of this level?!”

Sandalphon was in disbelief as she tugged the taut silk strands while planting her eight legs into the surrounding rock. A fleshy growth emerged on her large abdomen and two massive eyelids split apart, revealing a vicious and blood-red spider eye.

Crimson markings were vaguely forming upon her flawless black pearl-like face.

The cavern collapsed entirely with a rumble; all the groveling dark elves were buried alive.

A vast amount of aether began gushing in, condensing into the shape of a cross on the eye of Sandalphon’s abdomen. Attempting to dispel this invisible yet rapidly spreading force of Law, she activated her own power.

As previously mentioned, the biggest difference between a Supreme-rank and a Destructive-rank rested in the ability to interact and manipulate ‘Laws.’

Still, there was a distinction between superior and inferior Laws, as well as different levels of interactions. This was how the gap between Supreme-ranks could potentially be larger than the one between Supreme-ranks and Destructive-ranks.

After all, there were indeed certain Laws which offered no combat advantage. Supreme-ranks who mastered them could simply be labeled as opportunistic and were nothing compared to the real deal.

For example, the Supreme-rank dream creature ‘Rain God’ that was previously summoned by White Wolf would merely be an inferior knock-off among Supreme-ranks.

While there weren't many Supreme-ranks present in Norzin, nobody knew how many Supreme-ranks existed in the dream realm.

After all, rank was but a human construct, and none who existed in the dream realm were human.

Find the original at Hosted Novel.

The truth was all the more depressing. It was common knowledge that the vast amount of Supreme-ranks within the dream realm far outnumbered the ones in Norzin. Fortunately, Norzin wasn't much of a goldmine; otherwise, the people here would need to surround themselves with three walls to quell the terrors of the dream realm.

If not for the Wall of Fog, the whole of Norzin would've long ceased to exist.

Anyway, even if Candela's ancient soul hadn't appeared, the Truth Union's Aether Annihilation Cannon could have nullified the Rain God's combat prowess. With a follow-up of Destructive-ranks combatants, the entire incident would have been dealt with 'perfectly.'

What about the deaths of civilians and the destruction of property?

Apologies, that was all the fault of floods and factory explosions.

Returning to the topic, the power possessed by the Rain God was indeed the domain law of 'Rain,' a combination of two inferior elemental Laws: 'Water' and 'Lightning.' It could only exercise direct command over the elements but was unable to ascend it to a higher concept, which was a sign of ineptness.

If the Rain God did manage to manipulate a higher concept of Law, 'Rain' would no longer be 'Water' and 'Lightning.'

Instead, it would be 'cycle' and 'conversion.' And a further level upgrade would yield 'eternity.'

There wasn't much for a comparison between these three, and the gap between them represented the level of difference between Supreme-ranks.

Foundation, Origin, Law.

These were the three distinct levels of a Supreme-rank. Strictly speaking, only when the third level was attained could one be called a Supreme-rank.

Using Mu'en's ability, 'Source Death,' as an example, the Foundation was 'Killing,' the Origin, 'Death,' and its Law 'Cause and Effect.'

Since she had inherited the position as the Moon, she naturally wielded all of the power mentioned above. All she needed was to spend time practicing to control them.

Other Supreme-ranks, on the other hand, had to figure it out themselves.

'Spider God' Sandalphon's Foundation was 'Weaving.' Upon its sublimation to Origin, it became 'Connection,' encompassing 'Attachment' and 'Severance.'

As for her Law of 'Fate,' Sandalphon was barely able to touch upon it.

Currently, she wanted to utilize 'Connection' to 'sever' the enemy's 'Cause and Effect.'

The void, connected by spider silk, was linked to the location of countless shadow bugs. It displayed the current situation; a total of 3,722 shadow bugs.

Akin to a draft putting out lighted candles, everything connected to Cleveland was blown away into dust by the intangible Law the moment he disintegrated into the moonlight. The sequence of this disintegration had progressed to the level of connection they had with Cleveland.

Although Sandalphon was surprised by the level of Law shown by the enemy, as a veteran Supreme-rank, she was keenly aware of the enemy's inexperience with this mere contact.

Simply put, the opponent was like a child equipped with a hand-held howitzer.

The weapon's firepower might be impressive, but the wielder was struggling to even carry it.

Although a cannon's destructive power on its own was so devastating it could take out a field of people even without proper aim, an adult with a handgun could probably still dish out similar damage.

"Dammit! I could only save a third of them!"

Sandalphon's face was filled with incessant rage; a tenth of the surrounding silk had lost its glossy white sheen. Like withering vines, they began to either burn up or shrivel, drooping or snapping as a result.

Those were the exact shadow bugs she had under her control.

At the same time, these were the best tools that the Path of the Flaming Sword utilized. And now, more than half of them were erased!

To make things worse, there were members of the Path of the Flaming Sword experiencing accidents of varying severity and losing their lives.

Enraged, Sandalphon stomped all eight of her legs in a seething frenzy. She could finally clearly make out the entity that had wiped out a tenth of her 'Connection.'

"Impossible! A Destructive-rank?! How did a Destructive-rank manage to pick up the power of Law, and it is 'Cause and Effect'?!"

Sandalphon 'saw' the image in the void: a young girl devoid of expression shrouded in the moonlight. Like the soft glow of the moonlight, she had instantaneously appeared beside Sandalphon's largest doppelganger.

However, what arrived was a streaking spear made of condensed moonlight.

This razor-sharp moonlight spear traversed thousands of miles with unstoppable force and shot straight into the wide frame of the doppelganger, simultaneously piercing the eyes on both the human and arachnid portions of the body.

In doing so, the spear chained the shrieking doppelganger in an eerily elegant crescent. Right after, the moonlight bloomed into a ring, imprisoning the huge doppelganger in place.

All this occurred in a flash, so much that Sandalphon had only activated her power of Law a mere split second ago.

This was the speed of ‘moonlight.’

Ability: [Coronal Projection].

Sandalphon’s gaze was fixed on the spear. She once again felt the aura of a Law!

“How... how is this possible? Two types of Law?!”

She had spent countless times utilizing the Law of ‘Fate’ to synthesize a doppelganger puppet. Based on the concept, it was equivalent to another version of her, with a power level similar to when she had first gained ‘Weaving.’

And now, the doppelganger had been impaled before even detecting the actual enemy.

What if it had occurred to her actual body? Sandalphon now felt somewhat frightened.

All that she thought she had ever known was subverted, making her feel as if she was an ignorant person living under a rock.

However, an even more crucial question popped into Sandalphon’s mind.

Who is she?

Indeed, who exactly was this young girl whose appearance had

wiped out a tenth of her connections and even destroyed Sandalphon's doppelganger?

Sandalphon dared not use her ability to directly investigate. All she could do was extract the memory from her doppelganger. *Is-Isn't this the bookstore owner's assistant?!!!*

Chapter 298: The Hand Reaching Out From The Shadows

Chapter 298: The Hand Reaching Out From The Shadows

Before this moment, Sandalphon had never encountered an enemy that could wield two Laws. Right now, she no longer had any intention from moments ago to contact and unite the other angels who wanted to destroy the bookstore owner.

For some reason, this young girl who rode the moonlight didn't give off the aura of a Supreme-rank, yet she was still able to fully wield the fundamentals of a 'Law.' Simply put, this being who demonstrated Supreme-rank prowess could still be considered a Destructive-rank.

This had far surpassed Sandalphon's extent of knowledge; it was basically a paradox of its own!

The enemy had actually possessed two types of Law.

So, why had she yet to achieve Supreme-rank?

Sandalphon was utterly perplexed. All she could do was chalk this up as the enemy having an illusory skill that could deceive even a Supreme-rank.

With that, the potential power of the enemy had risen once again.

"Why would a Supreme-rank with this ability be working side by side with that bookstore? Even the closest of Supreme-ranks would usually have great difficulty working together."

Due to her many years upholding the communications in the Path of the Flaming Sword, it could be said that Sandalphon had a rather deep understanding of this fact.

Every Supreme-rank had their own exceptional pride. After all, it was difficult to feel self-important and arrogant when one had reached the ultimate stage in a certain field as well as being capable of controlling the ‘Laws’ of the world.

Cooperation meant more than just confrontation. Sometimes, it also meant to follow another’s instructions. When this happened, a fight might break out—no, a fight would break out.

This would mainly be caused by the individual pride of Supreme-ranks; they never changed their minds easily once it was made up. And when opinions clashed, there would be no possibility of unity.

This was also the reason why the Path of the Flaming Sword remained so scattered even though it had existed for such a long time.

Now, not only were the adversaries working together, it almost seemed like they had a master-servant relationship!

How ridiculous!

How could a Supreme-rank be the servant of another Supreme-rank?!

Sandalphon skimmed through the memories of her minions.

Her main body had only just awakened from her slumber, hence her memory wasn’t whole. She could only respond to Michael’s request and contact the other Angels on his behalf: by sending a message regarding a team up to discuss countermeasures.

After absorbing all relevant memories regarding this so-called Mu’en and the bookstore, she was rather surprised to discover that she had seen Mu’en’s face a year ago, in a lab by personnel from the Truth Union under her control.

Moreover, she was labeled as a homunculus?!

Sandalphon’s back arched involuntarily as a chill shot up to her head, causing her vertebra to wriggle and bulge under her skin like a centipede.

Her heart had felt indescribable horrors, so much that her mind went blank and no coherent thought could be formed.

Despite Sandalphon being around for many ages, this was an event that utterly stumped the ‘Spider God’ that ruled the dark elves and the shadow realm.

If Mu’en was indeed an homunculus, it would mean that she had only been ‘birthed’ into this world for only a year.

She was different from the bookstore owner who had simply materialized out of nowhere.

Instead, her origins were still traceable. All physical data regarding her had been recorded in the Truth Union laboratory where she was made up till her eventual disappearance.

Other than being made with a philosopher’s stone to give rise to a high degree of aetheric compatibility, the laboratory didn’t do anything else to raise innate ability before her escape.

“Which means to say, she didn’t absorb any aether whatsoever before she left the laboratory. She was just an ordinary and bona-fide homunculus with slightly stronger physical capabilities than an ordinary person.”

Unable to comprehend it herself, Sandalphon felt herself trembling as she grabbed both sides of her head and chuckled. “Heh, how is this possible?

“If this truly was the case, that would mean in just a few years—no, not years. Subtracting the years she spent in the lab, she went from an ordinary homunculus with some flaws to a Supreme-rank wielding two types of ‘Law’ in just four months?

“How can this be! How is it possible!”

Sandalphon’s head shook violently as the spider eyes lined all over her body kept blinking, squirming about and even bursting. Her heart was trembling with rage; this should be completely impossible. In fact, this was tipping the scales of the laws of the World.

Becoming a Supreme-rank without putting in thousands of years of effort was basically a pipe dream. This was downright stomping on the achievements of Supreme-ranks. *Ridiculous, four ridiculous months. What can one do in four months? In your dreams!*

Or rather, instead of dreams, this was Sandalphon's nightmare.

Sandalphon suddenly froze up.

An even more horrifying thought popped up.

Mu'en had been an unremarkable homunculus in the lab yet had suddenly become a Supreme-rank in four months. During this entire process, the only factor that changed and the only outlier was her becoming the bookstore's assistant.

The young bookstore owner's warm smile suddenly flashed across her mind.

"It's him!"

Support us at Hosted Novel.

Sandalphon had a sudden realization; she had made a fatal mistake in her previous judgment.

The bookstore owner was the mastermind behind all of this. His power level was at an unimaginable level; equal, if not greater than a Primordial Witch's.

And within the scene she saw in the void, the battle was already over.

The projection of the crown of the moon transmuted into a hazy halo, immobilizing the struggling doppelganger. In the blink of an eye, the halo tightened and with an absolute cutting edge, sliced the clone in half.

And by the time the bright light subsided, the young girl had already vanished.

There's still time. I can still make it if I recall the letters now!

Sandalphon disregarded the tumultuous injuries she had sustained from the faithful death of her doppelganger. Muttering to herself, she began pulling at the silk, preparing to un-send the letters.

Stopping herself, Sandalphon shook her head. “No this is too urgent. I need to attend to this personally, face to face. Otherwise, the few of them would not take this seriously.”

Sandalphon’s half human and half arachnid form seemingly dissolved into a dark form and assimilated into the shadow below her body.

As the ruler of the shadow realm, the fastest way to travel was naturally to jump into the shadow realm and traverse.

The humongous abdomen of the Spider God seemed to dissolve into a blackish puddle on the ground. Within this deep cavern, only cobwebs remained in the sullen emptiness.

Moments later, the black puddle seemed to bubble as a slender hand with skin as delicate as a black pearl reached out from it, desperately trying to grab hold of the surrounding rock walls, even ignoring the damage done to its sharp nails.

As if it was fleeing for its life.

However, in the shadows below, countless tentacles entangled and swirled as they chased after, forming another shadowy hand.

It was the hand of a man.

The hand clasped Sandalphon’s struggling hand, fingers interlocking. Like a couple holding hands, the shadow hand squeezed Sandalphon’s hand into a bloody pulp as it pulled her back into the shadows.

Sandalphon had made a huge and fatal mistake. She only noticed Mu’en using Source Death to kill Cleveland as well as Wallis and Pasha being mauled by Whitey. However, she had failed to notice Louie, who was swallowed by the shadows.

Chapter 299: Here's A Present For You

Chapter 299: Here's A Present For You

The moonlight condensed into Mu'en midair, and she appeared a distance from the bookstore, her face paler than before.

A fight with a true Supreme-rank might have been quick, but it sure wasn't easy.

While Sandalphon's doppelganger only had mastery of the first level of Law with the potential to reach the second level, 'Origin,' it was still a Supreme-rank. Moreover, Sandalphon herself had used 'Weave' to create numerous lines of fate on her clone as insurance.

Before dying, her doppelganger's counteroffensive counterattack was to impose all the woven bad luck on the enemy in a bid to weaken the lines of fate to its thinnest and most fragile form.

This was followed by trying to direct 'Sever' the other party's lines of fate to end her right there.

Unfortunately... She had encountered a Law that could completely counteract her own.

With the aid of Source Death, the coronal projection could eliminate not only life but also everything else, tangible or invisible, including fate.

In short, Source Death was superior to Sandalphon's Law by a whole level. If she could master 'Fate,' perhaps Sandalphon might have been able to contend against it. However, she was still at the level of 'Connection,' so the eventual outcome was obvious.

Still, Mu'en was injured.

She was, after all, still only at Destructive-rank and her only

experience was the battle with the pseudo-god. Even if she had a mastery of Laws, her experience was still lacking.

The power of fate condensed by Sandalphon's clone expanded all the flaws in Mu'en's body. Those inferior philosopher's stones that had accompanied her since her creation penetrated her flesh and bones, causing cracks to ripple out...

I'm still not strong enough... Mu'en thought to herself.

Wiping away blood on her lips, she made her way back to the bookstore with Whitey in her arms.

At the same time, she also applied a divine blessing on herself.

This novel is available on Hosted Novel.

The girl's pale face had returned to normal, but the ruptured damage from Origin had already become a part of her. Even if it could be restored back, the 'damaged inferior philosopher's stone' would just turn into a 'complete inferior philosopher's stone'... In this case, it would be as if she was a disabled person.

That is, unless she could find a perfect grade philosopher's stone to replace it.

Mu'en shook her head and mused, *As if a perfect grade philosopher's stone is that easy to find...*

She had learned a little about alchemy through what she saw and heard during her one year spent in the glass tank at the Truth Union's laboratory.

Refining a philosopher's stone didn't just require raw materials but the highest level of scholars as well. It was said that even the Truth Union's Chairman had only succeeded once.

Just that one time had made her close to ascending to Supreme-rank. And thus, she went into seclusion to break through to the next level.

The philosopher's stone she forged was used by the Truth Union to

power the Aether Annihilation Cannon.

Indeed, a shot of the Aether Annihilation Cannon required the use of a complete perfect grade philosopher's stone, but its power was enough to kill an ordinary supreme-rank.

This alone displayed how valuable philosopher's stones were.

Or rather, it showed the greatness of scholars as a class amongst transcendent beings.

In short, the people or organizations that could get hold of those perfect grade philosopher's stones were definitely tightly guarded.

As for the people who could make those stones, none could be found at present.

Mu'en opened the bookstore's door with Whitey in her arms.

Whitey was unscathed, of course. Under the protection of Mu'en, it wasn't just fine and had enjoyed a satisfying meal.

However, it wasn't stupid. After all, it was the deceitful and avaricious descendant of a pseudo-god. Naturally, it knew that today's close shave and escape wouldn't have been possible if Mu'en hadn't followed it.

Thus, it laid still obediently in Mu'en's arms to show its resolve to never galavant without permission again in the future.

The more it thought of what had happened just now, the more it felt that...

The usually scary Boss Lin's moment of indulgence had been used to teach little Whitey a lesson: the outside world was dangerous and a warning to not think about escaping.

That's right! Only this terrible man who wants to eat cats every day could do such a devious thing! Whitey nodded to itself, affirming this thought of its.

"Hmm? You're back..."

Behind the counter, Lin Jie looked up and was momentarily taken aback.

It was because of how worn out Mu'en was. Her clothes were stained with dirt and she appeared somewhat exhausted. Whitey's fur was ruffled, and there was a bit of some unknown red fluid at the corner of its mouth.

He recalled that Mu'en had gone out for quite a while.

The corners of Lin Jie's mouth twitched. She didn't really run into someone who stole and abused cats, did she?

Remembering that after promising the pretty elf cosplayer that everything would get better, Norzin experienced flooding right after, and now this — Had Lin Jie jinxed it?

Boss Lin pondered for a moment before he spoke, "Was everything alright? You shouldn't have encountered anything dangerous, right... If someone bullied you, let me know and I'll get back at them for you."

Not in person, of course, but rather, he meant to... call the police! Have Joseph settle it!

Mu'en shook her head.

"It's fine," she said. "Just a bunch of cat thieves and their mastermind. I dealt with them already."

The whole affair wasn't really considered dangerous, but the thought that was now naturally 'disabled' made her mood inevitably low.

Lin Jie knew his assistant was always honest and not a tsundere. 'It's fine' meant that it was just that.

Relieved, Lin Jie immediately brightened up. "That's good."

Then, he stopped smiling all of a sudden.

Wait a moment. What does 'dealt with' mean?

And what the hell did she mean by having dealt with the mastermind behind it all in such a short time?

Lin Jie could not help but ask, “Mu’en... Taking out bad guys is good, but a mastermind wouldn’t be found out so easily, right? Could you have been mistaken?”

Mu’en was startled, then suddenly became alert.

That’s right... Is a Supreme-rank that easy to kill?

Thinking back, the strength displayed by the opponent had been far below par. Moreover, in retrospect, the opponent’s reaction was strange when she put more thought into it... It was very likely that it had been a substitute or a clone.

Boss Lin’s amazing! He easily thought of something I hadn’t expected!

“I was careless,” Mu’en uttered gravely with a nod. “Thank you for your reminder.”

Lin Jie shook his head. He felt that a relapse of the chuunibyou disease had befallen his assistant. He guessed that she had probably scared away a few thugs and incidentally threatened the ringleader along the way but had instead used such scary words like ‘dealt with.’

He put on a facade at once, portraying his seniority and maintaining his authority while at the same time trying to be on the same wavelength as his assistant. “Umm, I’m here to remind you this time, but there’s no guarantee I will be there next time. You mustn’t act recklessly, okay?”

Mu’en nodded obediently.

Whitey, ignorant of the dangers of the world, immediately jumped out of her arms, darting over the counter and into Boss Lin’s arms, shivering and looking like it had been bullied, in hopes of being comforted.

However, to its surprise, Lin Jie had double standards and treated it differently.

The boss rapped his knuckles on the chubby cat's head and reprimanded, "Still having the gall to act like a spoiled child? One look at your bulging stomach and I can tell that you've had your fill! Let's see if you still dare to go out next time, troublemaker!"

Whitey was harshly reprimanded and could only hide its head beneath its paws and mew sadly, indicating that it wouldn't dare do so again.

"Oh, right."

Lin Jie took out a pink heart-shaped box and handed it to Mu'en. Softening his tone, he said, "Here's a present for you. Umm, thanks for all you've done for the bookstore these past few months. Open it and have a look."

Chapter 300: Its Justifiable For Bosses To Like Their Employees

Chapter 300: It's Justifiable For Bosses To Like Their Employees

Mu'en was stunned for a moment before she reached out and accepted the pink heart-shaped gift box.

Though her face remained as emotionless as ever, a wave of sentiments was rippling in her heart.

She was somewhat surprised and doubtful, which combined to make her feel a tad worried.

Using her database of basic knowledge, ***Door Key: Knowledge***, the young girl had familiarized herself with two things that were common in human society.

A pink heart usually represents 'love,' 'confession,' 'adoration,' and other similar feelings.

And based on that, didn't fashioning a gift box into such a shape as a present mean that they liked the person?

Wasn't this basically a confession?

Mu'en gently cupped the box in her hands and felt its heavy weight. Obvious confusion was plastered on her usually expressionless face. She then looked at Lin Jie to earnestly project her queries.

"Doesn't a heart... signify adoration?"

Lin Jie felt somewhat awkward. He initially wanted to create a gift box better suited for a lady; that's to say one which would be preferred by the fairer sex. The intention was for him to appear sincere.

When it came to the understanding of the aesthetic design of totems and symbols or concepts of traditional clothing patterns, Boss Lin

could come up with several theses and explain them eloquently. Even illustrating them personally wasn't a big deal either. Be it a grand or mysterious style, he was able to handle both. After all, he had had lots of experience.

But when it came to this sort of thing for a young girl, Boss Lin was as stumped as a three-year old and completely clueless.

In the end, all he could think of was a rather poor and gaudy design of pink and hearts.

Hence, the gift box was created.

It did look like... Boss Lin was presenting a gift for a confession of love.

“Cough cough...”

Lin Jie covered his mouth and gave a couple of coughs before replying unfazed, “The word ‘adoration’ isn’t just limited to couples. As a boss, it makes sense for me to ‘adore’ serious and hardworking employees.”

Mu'en thought about it and nodded earnestly.

That's right, it's indeed like this.

This child is so naive

, thought Lin Jie to himself. He then tapped her shoulder with a smile. “Open it. I think you'll like this gift.”

Meow~

At the side, Whitey let out a bitter call.

It eyed the box, then glanced at Lin Jie, its eyes glowing with eagerness. It appeared that the CATerpillar also wanted it...

Mu'en proceeded to open the gift box and froze up when she saw the whole crimson gemstone in it.

Her heart skipped a beat the moment she laid eyes on the gem.

To be more precise, her entire body from her heart to her limbs and bones all seemed to pound involuntarily. Her blood, veins, and even the marrow in her bones seemed to pump as if they were all cheering.

Eat it! Every cell in her body was telling her this.

As long as you eat it, you will gain much more...

“What do you think? It’s pretty, right?”

“Let me tell you this. Besides your boss, how many others in the whole of Norzin could get their hands on this?”

Lin Jie felt pleased with himself. *Have you ever seen a ruby this large?*

Even a top dog owner like Ji Bonong would probably struggle to locate a gemstone of this grade, right? ...Even if this was actually a philosopher’s stone researched and synthesized by the Path of the Flaming Sword and not actually a real ruby.

However, it was basically indistinguishable from an actual ruby both visually and physically.

So, your future as an employee here would be exceptional if you stay. Moreover, your Boss is gentle and generous, able to appease others with reason, making him an excellent leader.

Just ignore any others trying to poach you and focus on your work as a bookstore assistant.

Even though there weren’t anyone trying to poach his star employee away, Lin Jie still felt it was best to stay cautious and employ preventive measures.

Business was booming mostly because of Mu’en’s hard work. Lin Jie felt that it was necessary to win over his only subordinate, lest he became a lone commander again.

Mu’en nodded, finally returning to her senses after drowning in the

philosopher's stone in her hand.

This was a philosopher's stone of perfect quality... It was exactly as Mu'en had thought, there wasn't anyone else in Norzin that could get their hands on one indeed.

The girl suppressed her thumping heart and cautiously pocketed the ruby.

"Thank you," she uttered with a glow in her eyes.

Lin Jie patted her head. He was relieved to see genuine joy in her eyes. "What are you thanking me for? I have seen your months of hard work, this was well deserved."

With a slight glance at the gemstone, he continued, "You can use it however you like, you can exchange it for whatever you want, too."

In Lin Jie's opinion, this gemstone couldn't be crafted into a pendant either. He had simply given it to Mu'en to make her happy. He assumed that she would sell it eventually for money to supplement her living expenses...

Mu'en kept away the gemstone and gave an affirming response, "Yes, I will use it wisely."

For Mu'en, her utmost desire was, of course, power.

And just when she had been pondering her bottleneck, Boss Lin had swiftly provided a swift solution.

He must've long foreseen the results of Mu'en's recent battle and prepared it beforehand for Mu'en to realize her shortcomings.

At the same time, Boss Lin had unsurprisingly once again demonstrated his omniscience and omnipotence.

With this in mind, Mu'en added from the bottom of her heart, "Regardless of what I become, I will always follow you."

There, she expressed her loyalty.

And she wasn't swayed by materialism. What a good girl!

Lin Jie was very pleased, though he was even prouder of his subordinate.

We are Hosted Novel, find us on google.

Nobody will be able to poach her away!

“Very well, I'll look forward to that.”

He gave Mu'en a pat on her shoulder to encourage his assistant to continue working hard for the bookstore.

With the Rolle Resource Development's distributorship soon, the possibilities will be limitless...

While Lin Jie was thinking about Rolle Resource Development, the father daughter duo of the Ji Family were working on the distributorship deal.

But the work this time round had never been harder.

Reason being that they had no idea what they were even selling... Hence they could only fuss over how to sell and who to sell the products to.

The bookstore hadn't expressed any special instructions regarding how to sell the products. Thus, the arrangement naturally would be to follow his habits and practices; the books would be sold how they usually were.

As for who to sell to, this was the most important issue of all. And Ji Bonong already had a plan.

He had already written down a list of names.

And now, when everything was fully prepared, the task would be handed over to Ji Zhixiu.

Two days later.

At the entrance of the bookstore, Ji Zhixiu took a deep breath. As per the agreement, she had once more returned here.

Today, she would be presenting Boss Lin the invitation for her banquet as well as collecting the first batch of books.

She pushed the door open and sauntered in, immediately noticing the additional stack of books on the counter-top.

There were a total of five books of varying thickness.

Volume 4

Chapter 301: Five Books

Chapter 301: Five Books

“Mr. Lin, as per the contract, I’ve come to collect the books... Are these the books you’ve prepared for us to distribute?”

Ji Zhixiu’s cautious asking brought Lin Jie back from the book in his hand.

Lin Jie put down the book and looked up to see the familiar Miss Ji pointing at the five books he had placed on the counter beforehand.

She got closer to the books, wanting to feel, but pulled her hand back. Her face had many expressions—excitement, curiosity, and a mixture of awe and caution.

She clearly had a dignified face, like that of royalty, yet Lin Jie found her look of inquisitiveness amusing.

However, he still remained cautious, probably as a form of respect for the books as well as the regard he held for this partnership. Bursting into laughter on the scene wouldn’t look good on him.

With that, Lin Jie stifled his urge to laugh and instead coughed out a reply, “That’s right. I’ve only picked five books as a sample since this is my first time trying out a distributorship as a sales channel. If the results are satisfactory, I will be providing even more books in the future.”

“Even more—?!”

Ji Zhixiu had almost exclaimed in shock but immediately realized her impropriety. She quickly covered her mouth and suppressed her excitement. Taking a deep breath, she gave a monotonal reply, “Understood. Rolle Resource Development will not disappoint you.”

It appears that Boss Lin has some expectations for this distributorship. He wouldn’t have written five books to sell otherwise.

Five whole books!

Of the two books Ji Zhixiu received before, just ***Blood and Beast*** alone was more than enough. That book had already caused her strength and fate to change tremendously.

With that book, she directly rose from being an ordinary transcendent being to the pivotal leader of a hunter group.

Any one book in this bookstore was more than capable of cultivating extraordinary individuals.

And now, there were five.

Perhaps these mere five books would tip the power balance in Norzin.

But to Rolle Resource Development, this was an immense opportunity!

Because they were the distributors of these five books. In other words, Rolle Resource Development would handpick the people receiving these five books.

This was exactly the scenario that Rolle Resource Development could only dream of in the past!

These five people that could potentially change the tide would first directly interact with their 'benefactors,' the two in charge of the distributorship: Ji Zhixiu and Ji Bonong.

This meant that those five would have awe and respect for Rolle Resource Development, or more accurately, the Ji Clan, much like how the Jis revered Boss Lin.

These five would revere Ji Zhixiu and Ji Bonong the same way the Jis viewed Boss Lin... If these five books were given to Rolle Resource Development personnel...

But it was because Boss Lin viewed this with importance that Ji Zhixiu started to feel the pressure on her shoulders and a nagging worry in her heart. Those stray thoughts that popped up

disappeared as fleeting as they had come.

That kind, smiling face of Boss Lin in front of her and the looming shadow behind him seemed like it was constantly reminding her.

Certain thoughts that shouldn't exist should stay that way.

She wasn't just carrying the future of Rolle Resource Development on her back but the hard-earned trust of Boss Lin as well.

If she were to mess things up, the outcome on both sides would be devastating.

Actually, she was just referring to Boss Lin. For Rolle Resource Development, the most that might happen would only be soured relationships.

Lin Jie blinked, staring blankly at the face in front of him that was continuously showing a whole array of expressions. It was almost as if he was engaging in a complex psychic battle with Young Miss Ji.

And despite Boss Lin's vast experience of reading people, he was still unable to fully understand the inner thoughts of the other party.

He was indeed able to vaguely see that Ji Zhixiu had firstly been excited from this distributor agreement... Then, she seemed to be imagining some things before eventually waking up from her daydream.

Lin Jie could actually understand where she was coming from. Incongruous thoughts like these were commonplace if one was the successor of a large business empire.

Presented to her was an opportunity of a lifetime. A chance to make her influential and perhaps even reach the level of her father.

As such, her range of contrasting expressions wasn't out of place at all.

Still, when he thought about it, it was only distributing five books and there wasn't a need for such convoluted imagination.

Even if these books were never seen before and became best sellers, they were... nothing compared to the monopoly that Rolle Resource Development had.

Regardless of how good the sales of these books were, it would be nothing more than pocket change to them.

But the extreme swings in her expressions meant that there might actually be another situation that arose.

Perhaps like taking advantage of the opportunity to gain something she shouldn't.

Women are really difficult...

With a shake of his head, Lin Jie spread out the five books on the counter.

The Count of Monte Cristo , Pride and Prejudice , The Old Man and the Sea

, Water Margin , and One Thousand Classic Home-dishes (The Complete Colored 365 Days Edition) were the five books he had prepared just a few days before.

“As this is a test run of the distributorship, I’ve specially picked out books from different fields and genres that can appeal to everyone. For example, this book would be more suited for women.”

Ji Zhixiu saw Boss Lin holding up a copy of ***Original Sin & Inner Demons*** .

“Although men can also read this book, I still deem the contents easier for women to understand. Hence they should be the prime target audience.”

Ji Zhixiu hurriedly noted it down, nodded before continuing to look at Lin Jin. “Mhm, got it.”

This novel is available on Hosted Novel.

Lin Jie then picked up another book with the title, ***R'lyeh Text*** .

“This one is more in-depth, like an iceberg. What lies above is only the tip, a thousandth of what it actually is. And beneath the sea lies an enormous body that needs to be excavated.

“Therefore, it should be sophisticated people that should be targeted. Um, I recall that the Truth Union is full of scholars. Selling to them would be a good choice.”

Ji Zhixiu’s heart skipped a beat.

The Truth Union seems to have offended Boss Lin before... I can't help but have an ominous foreboding.

“Understood.”

“As for these two, the former would be suited for the masses and should be very well-received. After all, revenge is an age-old trope that never changes. Art mirrors life, and supply comes only with demands.” Boss Lin had a nefarious grin as he pointed at **Vengeful Spirit**.

“And the latter...” chuckled Lin Jie as he picked up **Book of Destinies**. “I’m just messing around with this one. Because a person who can truly understand this book practically doesn’t exist here. Just treat it as twisted joy on my part. I would be beyond elated if someone interested in it truly exists.”

As Ji Zhixiu gazed at the book, it was as if a fraction in time had seemingly vanished, leaving behind a dark spiraling void. Within the void was an endless universe of starry skies, and an enormous hand was tossing the stars to make them turn. All of it looked rather discolored.

The illusion vanished all of sudden, leaving Ji Zhixiu heaving her chest, evidently still in shock.

She then saw Boss Lin pick up the last book.

The title was— **Blood Sacrifice**.

Chapter 302: Recipe Book

Chapter 302: Recipe Book

Blood Sacrifice.

Ji Zhixiu's still agitated heart started to palpitate once again the moment she laid eyes on the book's title.

From the titles alone, the previous few books would seem mysterious and intimidating, but before seeing the contents, a casual observer could only rely on their imagination to deduce what was inside.

Someone like Ji Zhixiu, who was already well accustomed with Boss Lin's capabilities, would naturally be in awe of these books.

However, to an ordinary person, these books would cause some doubts.

More so when the latest book with its rather appalling cover page was before everyone in all of its bloody glory.

The contents of the book could be deduced at a glance.

Blood sacrifices!

Rituals which involved living flesh and blood to be sacrificed to the gods!

But some queries stood: whose flesh and blood was to be used? What type of ritual was to be conducted? And who was the godly recipient of these offerings?

Ji Zhixiu's heart pounded violently. She recalled that faithful rainy night, where the old man Wilde had passed her by outside the bookstore.

According to recent sources, that old man had now established a new yet powerful force in the shadows of Norzin—an evil sect

known as the 'Corpse Devouring Sect.'

It was rumored that they had chosen a god whose 'omniscience held the knowledge and power equivalent to the indefinite universe.' They would carry out extremely cruel methods in order to turn their enemies into sacrifices to be offered to their god.

The popularity of the Corpse Devouring Sect had recently seen a boom in Norzin, gaining strength and members at such a high rate that they were almost rivaling the Sun's Faith.

The two were like light and darkness; one akin to rays of sunlight shining unto humanity, while the other was like a rapidly spreading mold.

Their inhumane methods, stringent rules, and fanaticism of the followers were all factors which made people fear the Corpse Devouring Sect.

The organization was viewed like a scourge, denouncing the sudden appearance of this alleged omniscient entity as an evil god.

Only, they probably didn't even know the name of this evil god, nor did they know of his origins and legends. All of this was fabricated by Wilde. It was a cunning ruse to quickly rope and brainwash others into being his followers.

But as a regular of the bookstore, a daring thought had popped into Ji Zhixiu's head.

That is, this evil god must be somewhat connected to the bookstore.

There was a question that remained: Was Boss Lin a man of faith?

Though Ji Zhixiu didn't know the answer to that question, she dared not to make an assumption.

Yet at this very moment before her, the answer was about to be revealed.

Ji Zhixiu stared at the book in fixation.

Lin Jie was taken aback. None of the previous books had elicited such a reaction from Miss Ji. He initially presumed that the young lady would show more interest in *The Count of Monte Cristo* or *Pride and Prejudice*, yet, unexpectedly, the young heiress showed the most preference to the most ordinary book.

As the saying goes, ‘extremes meet.’ Perhaps she was too used to the love-hate relationships of upper-class societies that the ordinary now appealed to her.

Therefore, showing interest in a recipe book was also pretty reasonable.

Lin Jie couldn’t help but ask, “I never expected you to be interested in a recipe book. Have you perhaps been thinking about trying your hand at cooking?”

Miss Ji, who was born with a silver spoon, was too stunned to speak. As she deciphered the words from Boss Lin, her shock only intensified.

“Huh?! Re-recipe book?”

Lin Jie picked up the book and flipped through it again, confirming that it was the right one.

“Yeah, isn’t this a recipe book?” His tone was laced with suspicion as he uttered the most rhetorical of questions with widened eyes displaying bewilderment.

If she were to blindly judge the *Blood Sacrifice* book in Lin Jie’s hand by the two large bloody words for its title, Ji Zhixiu would have nearly been deceived by Boss Lin’s expert acting.

Mr. Lin still has that dark humor, huh. Ji Zhixiu thought to herself before she suddenly froze up.

Perhaps this book is really just a recipe book to him.

Having reached this notion, Ji Zhixiu felt a chill down her spine as goosebumps rose all over her skin.

This novel is available on Hosted Novel.

‘Blood Sacrifice.’ There was only one meaning to it—to kill a person and use his fresh blood and corpse as a sacrifice, as the means to worship and satisfy the divine.

To any ordinary individual, this behavior was inhumane, evil, and straight-up cruel.

But to a follower, this was a holy ritual to prove their loyalty.

What about toward a divine entity?

Weren’t these sacrifices simply just a ‘variety of dishes’? If so, wouldn’t the books recording the methods of blood sacrifices be known as ‘recipes’?!

Ji Zhixiu’s head felt numb, her body getting colder by the second as she seemingly felt as if she was looking into the realm of gods from another perspective. Like a fish out of water, suddenly finding herself hard to breathe.

If this was the case, then Boss Lin would definitely be—

“Why have you gone silent??”

Lin Jie waved his hand in Ji Zhixiu’s face, then flipped through the book again. With scrunched up eyebrows, he asked again, this time with a silver of self-doubt, “I’m not wrong, am I? This is a recipe book, isn’t it?”

Ji Zhixiu forced a smile and replied, “It is. I was just occupied with other thoughts. You aren’t wrong. This is indeed a recipe book.”

“Alright then.”

Lin Jie stared at *One Thousand Classic Home Dishes (The Complete Colored 365 Days Edition)* in this hand, having the feeling that something was off with Miss Ji.

Had she abruptly been reminded of that scumbag because she started cooking recently? Was that the reason she suddenly seemed

so sad?

That seemed like the most likely possibility.

Lin Jie decided not to probe further, lest he touch a raw nerve of Miss Ji's. "Based on my predictions, this book would likely be the most popular among the five. As such, I hope you will invest more publicity into this book.

"After all, everyone should know a little something about cooking or, at the very least, be involved in the process. What's more, this book has tons of homemade dishes. To be more specific, made with ingredients that are common in every household."

Lin Jie then added on, "However, the dishes in this recipe book aren't easy to master. Even if the steps are all listed out, the result would still depend on an individual's ability."

Ji Zhixiu nodded stiffly.

Indeed, when it came to this 'cooking', everyone ought to be involved. Who wouldn't become an ingredient when all was said and done?

The ingredients were common indeed; every household had people. Not having someone in a house would be an uncommon phenomenon instead.

'Not easy to master' was an understatement. The minimum requirement to become a sacrifice for the Corpse Devouring Sect was allegedly Pandemonium-rank. If a sacrifice didn't possess sufficient ability, things tended to spiral out of control. Therefore, to be able to perfectly complete a ritual, skill was a must.

"Anyway, I assume you've understood my requests for all five books."

Lin Jie stacked the books up once more and placed them in Ji Zhixiu's arms.

Ji Zhixiu panicked momentarily upon feeling the cumbersome weight in her hands, then she steeled herself and nodded her head

firmly.

“Understood. Rolle Resource Development will source out the most suitable buyers for you.”

“That’s not necessary. It will be alright as long as you deem them suitable.”

Lin Jie gave a smile to express that he didn’t expect too much of them.

The pressure on Ji Zhixiu’s shoulders only grew, but she could only press on, “Thank you for the trust you have in us.

“Here’s your invitation. We will personally chauffeur you there on the day of my birthday party.”

Lin Jie accepted the invitation card and squinted at it. Then, he shook his head. “There’s no need to go to that trouble. I will head over by myself.”

Chapter 303: Can't Stop Myself

Chapter 303: Can't Stop Myself

Ji Zhixiu was stunned. She had initially wanted to add on more but realized she wasn't in a business meeting and hence had no room for negotiation. Thus, she was quick to nod her head. "Your wish is my command."

"Mmm." Lin Jie nodded as well, but he suddenly realized the subtle change in Ji Zhixiu's expression and was skillfully able to pick up some hesitance on her face that had yet to fade.

Miss Ji seemed rather disappointed at the thought of not being able to personally bring him to the party.

Which also meant to say—she was actually looking forward to escorting him to the venue of the birthday party?

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow.

Shouldn't the star party be sitting down elegantly while accepting gifts and greetings from others?

Why would she 'downgrade' herself and specially make the trip to the bookstore to escort me?

What a strange arrangement, how unlike that of the party's host...

However, this very frantic expression and the crimson blush on her face during previous trips had also been very explicit. She had also requested for a rose as well as invited Lin Jie to her birthday party.

On top of that, Miss Ji had first stumbled across the bookstore at a time when she was suffering great emotional distress and betrayal.

In such a feeble state of mind, she had been given a heart-warming bowl of 'chicken soup for the soul.' As such, it was easy for her to tie this feeling of warmth and relief to Lin Jie who had provided that for her.

Resulting in developing feelings she wouldn't have otherwise.

This was the bold guess Lin Jie had.

Thus, Lin Jie felt obligated to help this lost lamb turn back, lest Miss Ji finds herself stuck in a 'quagmire,' unable to extricate herself from a dream that could never become reality.

Ji Zhixiu wrapped the five books and placed them in a specialized box before saying cautiously, "If that's the case, I'll make preparations for these few..."

"Wait a moment," Lin Jie said as he got into his most common posture: arms folded with chin propped on his interlocking fingers. "I feel the need to clear up some stuff, lest things proceed in the wrong way."

"!"

Ji Zhixiu was like a deer caught in headlights as panic overwhelmed her.

She had no idea that the way she reacted had made it seem as if all her secrets had been spilled to Lin Jie.

"There's no need to be so nervous." Lin Jie softened his tone. "I didn't mean to be too harsh on you, since it's common for people to have these sorts of notions, even more so when there are special circumstances. Desire triumphs over reason, and this is a definite given."

Lin Jie didn't think there was anything wrong with how he phrased his words.

Being attracted to one's savior was a really normal psychological phenomenon.

My previous fleeting yet wayward thoughts to sell the five books to the supporters of the Ji family was still discovered! The guilt-stricken Ji Zhixiu thought to herself.

She lowered her head and replied regretfully, "My apologies. I got

carried away by my selfishness and couldn't contain these thoughts. I ask for your forgiveness for having had these inadequate ideas."

Aha! Lin Jie knew he guessed correctly; she'd definitely developed feelings for him.

"Haa..." Lin Jie sighed. "That's just human nature, you can't be faulted for it.

"Just that, I think there's something you need to understand. There are some thoughts that should never exist in the first place as it would only bring about many problems for you, me, and even your father. Things wouldn't go well, especially since you know, the gulf between us is just too wide."

Lin Jie smiled as he advised with utmost sincerity, "I would be unable to stop myself if you come too close."

Unable to stop himself from the alluring pull of riches, as well as the young heiress of a monopolistic corporation. Just the thought alone could make Lin Jie shudder.

Ji Zhixiu had already long known about the distance that existed between them. Regardless of how much improvement she made, be it becoming a Destructive-rank or a Supreme-rank, all that would do was to make her realize how great the gulf between them. She would never ever assume she could close the gap between Boss Lin and herself.

But, what can't Boss Lin stop himself from?

Ji Zhixiu glanced at the case in her hand; among the five books was ***Blood Sacrifice***, considered as a recipe book by Lin Jie. In this case, "unable to stop myself" could only mean one thing.

—That is, he would be unable to stop himself from eating her up.

This realization frightened Ji Zhixiu, causing her to shiver as she looked at Lin Jie with fear in her eyes.

Even though she had always respected Boss Lin, she was really incapable of keeping her cool at that very moment.

This novel is available on Hosted Novel.

Lin Jie saw it all very clearly. How Ji Zhixiu's face had paled instantly before breaking out in slight trembles. It appeared that she had been deeply hurt by the decisive refusal.

I'm truly sorry, but it is my greatest responsibility to make things clear.

Lin Jie gave another sigh before adding on, "You must think that I am cruel?"

Ji Zhixiu shook her head frantically like a rattle.

"No. I truly believe that you are a really gentle person." Ji Zhixiu forced a smile.

Had she confirmed it out loud, Ji Zhixiu would have been instantaneously turned into a dish even without needing to get close.

Lin Jie could only blink as he felt that this child was beyond hopeless.

Why was she still being so stubborn with such a clear and obvious reaction?

"Never mind that. In any case, let's just keep a distance between us. Perhaps my so-called 'gentleness' in the past led to some misconceptions, but I need you to understand that it was all just a misunderstanding."

Lin Jie deliberately turned stone cold.

Though he could use this opportunity to gain even more benefits, taking advantage of another's feeling was something even Lin Jie couldn't bring himself to do.

"Think about it carefully, yeah?"

Ji Zhixiu stepped out of the bookstore and sighed.

The weight of the five books in her hands didn't seem like the weight of books but rather the weight of Rolle Resource Development's future.

Choosing five suitable buyers for the books seemed to be another one of Boss Lin's tests. After all, he did mention he would be attending the banquet by himself. But, if this business deal were to fail, he could choose not to come altogether.

To reject her offer of escorting him over was most likely an insinuation of maintaining a distance.

Combined with Boss Lin's warning and the way he asserted his dominance back at the Jis previous visit to the bookstore, he had already made clear his intentions. He was only willing to entertain these ants with their game due to their 'tribute,' but it didn't mean he would stand with them.

Hence the issuance of this direct warning.

I know in detail all your hidden agendas; do what you're told and do it well, and never bite the hand that feeds you. Else the patience and mercy granted by me will disappear— This was definitely the message Boss Lin wanted to send across to Ji Zhixiu.

His graciousness was not something she could take advantage of with her presumptuousness.

Just like that, the short-lived seed of hope in Ji Zhixiu's heart was quickly smothered before it could even sprout.

Chapter 304: Raid On The Corpse Devouring Sect

Chapter 304: Raid on The Corpse Devouring Sect

Ever since she beat Oswald's grandson into a coma, Melissa had been confined by her own father for a week.

Melissa was in the combat division and hence wasn't supposed to be under Joseph's supervision. It was just that Joseph did have many former friends as he had former enemies.

Melissa's current top superior, Winston, also happened to also be a good friend of Joseph's.

Therefore, it could even be said that Melissa had been a 'junior personnel that had caught the member of a corrupt internal faction' and had done a meritorious deed.

However, her attacks had been too overpowering and had given Todd a severe concussion. Medical attention hadn't been provided quickly enough, resulting in Todd's brain function being affecting and causing him to suffer brain damage.

Thus, in accordance with Secret Rite Tower regulations, she was to be placed under a seven-day confinement as punishment for causing grievous hurt to another.

Of course, this explanation was just surface level.

Joseph had rejoined Secret Rite Tower and was immediately raised back to the rank of Great Radiant Knight. Therefore, the situation wasn't as simple as it would be if just a few regular knights were involved.

The entire Oswald faction had influence in all four of Secret Rite Tower's divisions. If Oswald was likened to be a tree that shaded them, these people were like the roots, boring into every corner of

the organization.

Uprooting the problem at its... roots wasn't an easy task.

At present, their greatest backer had fallen, and these people could no longer hide under his protection. However, it was much harder dealing with the underlings than the boss. Ordinary members that lacked power usually idled away and remained unnoticed precisely because of this.

Therefore, it meant that when things went south, they would continue to stay even more hidden, making it difficult to be tracked down.

We are Hosted Novel, find us on google.

Furthermore, back when Joseph at his prime was the Great Radiant Knight Chief, his righteous and upright character had offended many. Their distaste for him only grew with time, resulting in a hidden maelstrom gradually swelling.

A prime example would be the recent raid that Joseph launched on Oswald's mansion. While he had followed the Council of Elders' instructions and executed the mission with proper procedures, there were still some who made a fuss about the whole situation.

They accused Joseph of being un-conscientious; causing Oswald's death, as well as allowing an increasingly problematic criminal to escape once again.

Some even went as far as to suspect Joseph of colluding with Wilde, using the latter as a cover-up for his own criminal cooperation with Oswald.

Under such circumstances, had the supposed 'fire-starter' Melissa be allowed to resume normal training and missions, that would be equivalent to placing her in the eye of the storm.

Putting aside the persecution, embarrassing gossip would've already made the young lady very uncomfortable.

While Joseph reckoned mental training had been beneficial to

Melissa's growth, the damage done from his past two years of neglect was well apparent in the Todd incident.

These 'trainings' had gone on long enough... Now that he was making a comeback, Joseph naturally needed to free up his time and return back into Melissa's life to perform his duty as a father.

As such, the 'confinement' was only in name. It was actually just protection for his daughter.

Pa!

Melissa shut the book in her hands, exhaled sharply while shutting her eyes and thinking through the contents she had read.

At this moment, she felt a deep sense of weariness and satisfaction.

The keystones of everything basically have the same fundamentals. Yet because their methodology, combinations, or arrangement differ from one another, it allows things to gain different attributes. If we are able to control these 'keystones' using aether, we will be able to master their shape, form, and existence.

Before this, I could only 'see' the structure and existence of these keystones. Now with the basics all set, I can finally exploit the cracks and unstable regions of an object. Like how I had dealt with Todd, now I can even destroy a shield that can withstand a Destructive-rank attack.

But viewing from another perspective, this is ultimately all that I can do.

If there truly were a Destructive-rank before me now, I wouldn't even be able to last a single round. Largely because I won't even have the chance to pressure a Destructive-rank into playing defense. Rather, it would be the exact opposite. After all, I can only see through their skills, not defend against it.

But, what if I could manipulate them, or even deconstruct their aether? Even Destructive-rank attacks would just fall apart like a house of cards!

So... this is what true power is.

Melissa's eyes shone and sparkled with excitement as these thoughts ran through her mind and she was barely able to contain her joy.

She appeared very haggard with dark patches under her eyes. Her face was pale white, yet elation was written all over it.

She had obtained the book ***Door Key: Origin*** from the bookstore for three whole months already, but it was only now that she truly caught a glimpse of that door.

Before today, she would fall into a state of involuntary fainting every time she read this book.

Though she was undoubtedly making progress, it was as if she were a primary school student that had received high marks and was now drowning herself in studies—extreme inefficiency.

If based on her previous level, she wouldn't even be able to decipher a thousandth of the book's contents.

She was not gathering knowledge but being swallowed by knowledge instead.

The more she couldn't understand, the more she craved it.

And thus, she could only continuously flip page after page, all till her body could no longer physically withstand her spirit. Consequently, she had to rely on outside forces to snap her out of this trance each time she read the book; otherwise, she would have already collapsed and died.

Through this painful learning process, Melissa's mind and body were repeatedly tempered instead.

She also saw a spike in her power, ascending to Destructive-rank.

Just that considering how Secret Rite Tower's stance was unclear, she had chosen to hide her power and only a select few knew about it.

In time, I'll no longer need to continue hiding it anymore. According to Father, Secret Rite Tower will soon be wholeheartedly putting all

resources on trying to get on Boss Lin's good side.

While the Council of Elders' intention to 'get on Boss Lin's good side' wasn't all that simple, there was nothing stopping Melissa from assuming this.

Hehe , Melissa chuckled to herself.

Personnel that had initial contact with the bookstore, including Joseph, Melissa, and Carolyn would naturally become the core of Secret Rite Tower's upcoming operations.

In other words, those who still held a grudge against Joseph were practically going against the Council of Elders.

They brought this onto themselves! Melissa stood up with the book in hand as she contemplated.

She was within a tiny confinement chamber in Secret Rite Tower. The only furnishings in this cramped space were a table and a bench.

Melissa was allowed three hours for socialization each day during her confinement period. These three hours were separated and implemented during meal times.

And to prevent psychological problems, Melissa was allowed to bring books, magical items, or other stuff to keep her occupied. After all, confinement was not supposed to be torture but a means for reflection.

Melissa had also been confined occasionally in the past. Secret Rite Tower was comprised of transcendent beings and not mere mortals, so being put in confinement for three days to a week wouldn't really cause them any psychological trauma.

Today was her last day of confinement.

A door materialized on the wall behind Melissa the moment she stood up, and it opened slowly.

An instructor from the combat division was standing at the door

and handed Melissa a stack of documents without showing any hint of emotion.

“Melissa, your confinement has ended. You have been assigned a new mission.”

Melissa took the documents and examined them before immediately breaking into a frown.

Something isn't right with this raid on the Corpse Devouring Sect's hideout on 67th Avenue!

Chapter 305: The Truth Union's Request

Chapter 305: The Truth Union's Request

Something isn't right!

Melissa immediately became alert when she heard that there was a mission.

Before she was put in confinement, Joseph had told Melissa that he would transfer her to the Intelligence Division in order to better protect and guide her.

Now that Joseph had successfully made a spectacular comeback, he would only face more troubles in the future.

And under this sort of circumstances, Melissa was basically his only weakness. Thus, transferring her to the Intelligence Division was most appropriate and the only choice for both Joseph and herself.

While the Combat Division was the strongest of the four Secret Rite Tower divisions, with more than half of the current ten Great Radiant Knights inside, it was also the division responsible for the vast majority of the dangerous tasks with more than enough opportunities for actual combat.

For any ordinary member of Secret Rite Tower, joining the Combat Division was undoubtedly the best choice if they wished to advance further.

Many from the other divisions felt that joining the Combat Division was glorious and racked their brains trying to think of ways to squeeze in.

But in terms of combat, was there anyone currently in Secret Rite Tower that could compare with Joseph, who was formerly the Great Radiant Knight Chief?

Should Melissa want to learn how to fight, wouldn't it be easy to ask her father to mentor her?

We are Hosted Novel, find us on google.

Also, Joseph's comeback was the decision made by the Council of Elders and naturally, they supported him fully. The case regarding Oswald's situation a few days ago had been put to bed with all credit being attributed to Joseph, and he was reinstated the title of Great Radiant Knight the following day.

Like a storm, it swept through the entire Secret Rite Tower.

All of Joseph's admirers went 'crazy.' Oswald was a veteran Great Radiant Knight and was a genuine Destructive-rank even if he was already aged.

Joseph's indifferent remark at that time, "Unfortunately, Oswald, despicable would just be your epitaph," and the image of Oswald's head being ripped off as if by an invisible force 'happened' to be recorded as well and went viral among all the transcendent community.

In one night, the whole Norzin learned that the 'Indomitable Sacred Flame,' so powerful that he had no match, had returned once more.

At first, most expected that he would directly assume the position of Combat Division Chief. However, Joseph made it clear that he would stay on as the Intelligence Division's Chief.

This disappointed the once more stirred-up Combat Division knights, but then a strange trend appeared—Division Transfers!

Knights of Secret Rite Tower were free to transfer divisions as long as they had the Council of Elders' approval and passed the examination of the division they wanted to get into.

Similar to how it had been like when Joseph transferred from Combat to the Intelligence Division.

Admirers in the Combat Division had submitted lots of applications in the past couple of days, seeking transfers to the Intelligence

Division.

These admirers claimed it was a step toward following in the footsteps of their idol, while some fanatics even call it a 'Pilgrimage path,' which was, of course, a term that they only used in private.

Thus, even though Joseph had promised Winston he wouldn't steal the position of Combat Division Chief from the latter, in just a short span, the Combat Division's original manpower had been reduced by a third as they all transferred to the Intelligence Division...

This was much worse than stealing the position.

Even if that hadn't happened, the status of the Intelligence Division would probably be on par with the Combat Division from now onward.

It was something everyone knew, just like the reason for Melissa's current detention and the likelihood that she would be transferred straight to the Intelligence Division in the future... No, it was a sure thing.

So, why had she been assigned a new mission all of a sudden, at such a moment that anyone could tell was crucial?

Moreover, it wasn't just any mission.

Rather, it was a highly dangerous mission of besieging and raiding the Corpse Devouring Sect's hideout which could perhaps even last for a month.

It was common knowledge that the leader of this new and evil Corpse Devouring Sect was Wilde, the Destructive-rank black magician.

Moreover, Wilde and Joseph were eternal enemies.

Now, Joseph's only weak spot—his only daughter—was being assigned to raid the Corpse Devouring Sect's hideout... This was no different from sending a sheep into a tiger's den.

There was something very wrong with this mission...

Melissa's face darkened. She placed the documents down and looked straight into the instructor's eyes. "Who else other than me is assigned to this mission? What's the danger level?"

The instructor replied, "All of the Combat Division Squad Five members, including Great Radiant Knight Vivian. The danger level is P-D."

The Combat Division was divided into 10 squads; Great Radiant Knights led the first, and the captain of Squad Seven was 'Scarlet Lancer' Vivian. Melissa was just but a lowly team leader in Squad Seven so participating in a comprehensive Squad Seven operation wasn't anything out of the ordinary.

P-D level meant that generally, Pandemonium-ranks could complete this mission, but there was a chance of Destructive-rank enemies showing up during the process.

The instructor added, "This is an urgent mandatory mission from the Council of Elders. It cannot be refused."

However, Melissa didn't buy it. She stared at him and said, "I won't refuse, but I have to say goodbye to my father first. I remember that there's a rule in the Tower which mentions that Pandemonium-rank personnel can bid farewell to their families before performing a mission above P-level."

The instructor showed indifference and said, "I can help convey that to your father, for he may not have the time."

Melissa retorted coldly, "Regardless of whether my father is free or not, he would definitely make time knowing that his daughter is embarking on a P-D level mission."

Eyeing the young red-haired lady before him, the instructor then said, "Sir Joseph is currently on another urgent mission."

Melissa didn't back down. "What mission?"

The instructor seemed to hesitate for a moment before replying, "This ought to be confidential, but as you are Sir Joseph's family as well as Combat Division personnel, telling you this should be

alright... Andrew, Vice-Chairman of the Truth Union, issued a request to Secret Rite Tower, for us to send dispatch personnel to help clean up Machine Loop.”

Melissa was thoroughly taken aback by this mission that she had never heard of before.

Machine Loop was the place where the Truth Union would use for all kinds of experiments, which was equivalent to their most secret basement.

But now, they were asking Secret Rite Tower to help clean up something so private... This was simply absurd. In the past, the Truth Union would always hold and hide Machine Loop like a treasure.

Now doing something like this was akin to bringing out their secret lover and sharing it with the world!

“Why?” Melissa asked in surprise.

“The reason given by Andrew was that two scholars had recently gone missing with some documents during the course of their experiments and had likely entered some forbidden areas in Machine Loop. Therefore, they decided they might as well clean up the unexplored sections of Machine Loop. The danger and risk were very high, so Sir Joseph was dispatched.”

The instructor looked at the time and said, “Alright, if you have anything to say, I can help pass it on to Sir Joseph, but there’s no time to lose right now.”

Although Melissa was still unwilling, there hadn’t been anything wrong during this whole process of the mission briefing. Thus, she eventually nodded and agreed.

As the instructor watched at the back of the red-haired young lady leaving, the corners of his lips curled up into a sly smile.

The image of a long sword wrapped in flames indistinctly appeared in his eyes.

Chapter 306: The Void Intermediary's Demonstration Of Strength

Chapter 306: The Void Intermediary's Demonstration of Strength

The image that appeared in the instructor's eyes was fleeting and soon disappeared into the depths of his pupils.

The strange sneer on his face that had appeared on his face in that brief moment melted away like snow, turning into a somewhat vacant expression.

"W, what's going on...? Why am I here? What was I doing here again?" muttered the instructor in confusion as he stared at his two hands.

The faint dizziness made him feel unsteady on his feet.

He shook his head to take a breather, stood still, and frowned at the empty confinement chamber in front of him.

Vague memories gradually emerged in his mind.

He had received an order from his superior to release Melissa from the confinement chamber... which he did.

Then, he was to inform Melissa to go through the paperwork of transferring her from the Combat Division to the Intelligence Division to be under her father, Joseph.

Although her entire team was out on a mission, this was a direct order of the highest priority from the Council of Elders which overrode all previous orders.

While this seemed like special treatment, everyone knew that Joseph was in high demand now, and the Council of Elders seemed

to be determined to nurture Joseph to be the core of Secret Rite Tower.

Moreover, it wasn't just as simple as just regaining the title of Chief Great Radiant Knight. Joseph had already attained this honor in the past, and to be given this title now... Perhaps the Council of Elders intended to make him the youngest 'one of their own.'

When considering it this way, it seemed that no special treatment was too much for Melissa, Joseph's only daughter.

"So... Have I finished informing her?"

The instructor couldn't not help wondering.

Currently, he had a vague recollection that he had indeed informed Melissa, had a few words with her, and the latter had also nodded in agreement.

However, for some reason, something felt off... yet he couldn't put his finger around what was wrong.

"Never-mind, since she's already left, I should have completed the task. And there shouldn't be any problem whatsoever."

The instructor shook his head and gave a sheepish laugh. "How could anything go wrong?"

He checked the confinement chamber, then closed the door and turned to leave, muttering to himself, "I'm probably drained from undertaking too many missions these days... I'd better ask for leave and take a few days off to rest."

As he got further and further away, the entrance of the confinement chamber returned to silence.

In a certain nameless void.

A hooded figure in a black, thick, and tattered robe let out a sneer.

The sneer was infectious. It was a mix of male, female, and child voices, soft yet chilling as it echoed throughout the void like a death toll.

Anyone hearing it would find their mind frazzled for a moment.

In the very center of his shadow, a long sword lit up in flames, then died out in an instant.

A squirming under the heavy, bulky robe followed after. Several slippery, disgusting tentacles, of a rust-like color stretched out, twisting together, and pulled a letter out of the void.

This letter had been delivered through a shadow spider not too long ago.

It was from ‘Brood-mother’ Sandalphon, to ‘Void Intermediary’ Zaphkiel.

This was how the Path of the Flaming Sword transmitted information among the ten leaders.

Of course, most of the information that was transmitted to him was viewed as garbage and disposed of by Zaphkiel... He was an independent being who transformed himself into a void and forsaken the world.

He was extremely solitary and arrogant, only willing to forge his own path, and had no common language with any other transcendent beings.

He had always been disdainful of the Path of the Flaming Sword.

Naturally, he won’t even take a glance at the missions and intelligence that were sent to him, whether he ignored them or not depended on his mood.

Although he was also a Supreme-rank, Zaphkiel had a sense of superiority over others because of his existence.

He was the most ancient magician, the lord who took over the Void as his territory.

In this kingdom of only one, he enjoyed absolute freedom, and this was the perfect, complete realm that he sought.

As for the Path of the Flaming Sword, who cares?

But the covenant that Michael tricked him into making binded him, leaving him with no choice but to be responsible.

He could ignore most other matters, but it was Michael's request this time and he had to reply...

“Join forces? Heh...”

Zaphkiel scoffed as he perused the letter in his hand before crushing it into a ball with his tentacles. “Something that I haven't been able to complete for so many years, and he wants to get it done just with a letter? How boring. Besides their strength, their brains are also empty and no different from stupid mortals.”

The letter was corroded and devoured by the void, completely disappearing.

But... It seemed kind of interesting this time around.

“A sudden appearance of a Supreme-rank that even the void didn't notice. Looks like he's really quite something.”

Zaphkiel took some interest in the bookstore's owner described in the letter.

He hadn't cared about the world for many years, but the void would be able to sense the birth and departure of each Supreme-rank.

We are Hosted Novel, find us on google.

He hadn't been the least bit aware of the Supreme-rank described in the letter at all.

And he hadn't even noticed Gabriel's death.

It was as if the enemy did not exist in this space and time, and when Gabriel died, he was also dragged into that space and time

that didn't exist.

Zaphkiel did not believe in man but in the void.

For void never lies.

Therefore, he was rather intrigued by this Supreme-rank and had the rare desire of wanting to cross paths with him.

However, he wasn't planning to act together with that bunch of empty-headed Supreme-ranks. Rather, he wanted to spend some time on his own to get a hold of the bookstore owner's information.

Most of the information here was the bookstore owner's hobby: acting as an ordinary bookstore owner, and selling books containing vast amounts of taboo knowledge to certain transcendent beings and taking the opportunity to nurture them.

There were several prominent figures, but clearly the most eye-catching ones were Wilde and Joseph.

These two seemed to be the two strongest chess pieces set up by the bookstore owner, the ones he had put a lot of thought and effort into... And these two had the most promise to advance into Supreme-rank.

Thus, Zaphkiel decided to start with these two pieces, to give the bookstore owner 'a friendly greeting.'

Since you've put so much thought into it and obviously been trying to keep the conflict between them from erupting, I shall blow it up easily so that all your efforts will be wasted!

This would be a declaration of war but also a demonstration of strength.

Haha... It's really such a simple matter. As long as the girl shows up on the battlefield, conflict between the two will be irreconcilable. I guess I have to thank Raziel for providing this opportunity.

It's about time to let Sandalphon know that what they fear isn't actually much to worry about.

Having come to his decision, Zaphkiel decided to let his thoughts cross the void to contact the Brood-mother to show off his accomplishments.

Huh? What's going on?

Zaphkiel suddenly froze.

Because upon extending the reaches of the void, Zaphkiel realized that there was nothing in Sandalphon's nest nor were there any traces of her existence.

All that met him was silence. A chilling, dead silence.

Chapter 307: The Sullen Void

Chapter 307: The Sullen Void

The reason Zaphkiel got the moniker ‘Void Intermediary’ was very simple—he had already managed to intertwine his soul and spirit to the void. The reformed body beneath his cloak was the result and proof of his entwinement with the void.

At this moment, his wisps of consciousness that flowed within the void had now extended into the lair of the Brood-mother.

Where’s Sandalphon?

Zaphkiel wondered as he surveyed the deserted nest.

With a frown, he allowed the void to extend and sweep through every nook and cranny of the lair. However, other than cracked ancient stone walls, numerous strands of spider silk, and several crushed dark elves, there really was nothing else of note in the collapsed cave.

The entire place was practically as silent as a ghost town.

However, Zaphkiel was absolutely certain that this was the lair in which Sandalphon had hibernated within for thousands of years. As a Supreme-rank, he would never make a simple mistake such as ‘entering the wrong door.’

In fact, not too long ago, Sandalphon’s shadow spiders had even delivered Michael’s orders to him. This was definite proof of her awakening.

Since she’s already awakened, she couldn’t possibly have just—Well, she did disappear into thin air.

Could she have personally gone to inform the others? But is it really necessary to mobilize everyone herself when it’s just such a simple situation?

Zaphkiel inspected his surroundings again, this time discovering an outlier in the cave.

There were strange markings where the stone walls and the ground connected. These closely resembled scratch marks from someone attempting to cling on and fight for their life.

If these marks were really made by fingers, without a doubt, Sandalphon was the owning living being that fit the bill.

In other words, owing to unknown circumstances, the person that had struggled viciously at this spot was indeed Sandalphon.

Could she have encountered an enemy?

It was only natural for Zaphkiel to come to this conclusion, and his face turned sullen.

Encountering an enemy at such a time was way too much of a coincidence.

He was instantly reminded of the common enemy they were going to face—the existence known as Lin Jie, the owner of that nameless bookstore.

Did he lay a hand on Sandalphon?

Zaphkiel considered the possibility, albeit with a sliver of doubt and bewilderment.

Because theoretically, the void which had enveloped every corner of the world should've alerted him about this battle which had taken place, yet he hadn't had an inkling.

All along, Zaphkiel only had absolute trust in the information that the void held. However, this incident didn't just make him uncertain; it also resulted in him having more questions than answers.

It had been the same previously when Gabriel died without a trace. How could a Supreme-rank just disappear like that as if practically vaporized?

Could this really be another Supreme-rank making a move? I don't believe it.

Regardless, perhaps the bookstore owner is just putting up a front. Maybe, behind his facade is a greater force at play.

A Primordial Witch?

Search Hosted Novel for the original.

At this point, or rather, when the term 'Primordial Witch' popped up in Zaphkiel's mind, the previously lull void had an abrupt reaction.

A deluge of information flooded out.

The Moon, a church, different girls, covenants, a silver ring, and lastly, a woman in a black veil that blurred her facial features.

The void seemed to be boiling as it bombarded Zaphkiel with an influx of information, causing his body beneath his black robes to either twist violently or pulsate before straight up bursting out smooth white tentacles.

Zaphkiel's tentacles started to wriggle rabidly. Only after some time did he sigh as the intangible ripples started to calm as the void once more regained its serenity.

He felt a little overwhelmed but shook his head and calmed himself down.

It appeared that Walpurgis, the witch that controlled the night, had finally awoken within her dream and had once more returned to this world.

If so, the newly formed religion, Sun's Faith, which all our Path of the Flaming Sword probing has proven fruitless, must have been Walpurgis' doing. It all makes sense now!

No wonder that bookstore owner is so powerful; it's because the one backing him is the very same Walpurgis that once protected mankind.

Zaphkiel came to this sudden realization.

That meant that the one behind all of it could very well have been Walpurgis. It was no wonder Zaphkiel hadn't noticed anything at all. This was certainly possible with the power of a Primordial Witch.

The more Zaphkiel observed the strange gully-like markings, the more he felt that something was off.

These lines weren't pointing towards the surface. Instead, they traveled along beneath.

Yet somehow, at some point, the trail disappeared midway. Thus, it was as if someone had reached out and pulled down from underneath. From this, the situation on the surface now made sense. Walpurgis must've activated her own Domain of Law and pulled Sandalphon into it, perhaps even killing her in the process, but Zaphkiel wasn't too sure about that.

He couldn't help but inquire into the void, "Is Sandalphon dead?"

Though Zaphkiel's spirit was intertwined with the void, ultimately, he still wasn't fully accepted by it. Thus, he wasn't able to fully share information with the void and had to take the initiative for more extensive details.

Unclear .

That was the answer given by the void.

Zaphkiel could only leave his mouth agape, distraught written all over his face. He had never gotten an answer like this from the void before.

This was a definite question, not some open-ended query. There were only two possible answers—dead or alive.

Yet the void said it was 'unclear.'

Unless Sandalphon was trapped in some sort of gas chamber, in a state between life and death?

Perhaps like before, Walpurgis had hidden the information before the void could pick it up.

This was the only thing that Zaphkiel could think of.

He followed up, “Where is Sandalphon now?”

The void only greeted him with silence.

“What are the origins of the bookstore owner?”

Silence.

“Will our joint action be successful?”

Silence.

None of the three questions could be answered!

Zaphkiel was at a loss.

Staring at the sullen void before him, he asked one final question, unsure if the question was meant for him or someone else, “Will this operation be worth it?”

The void suddenly reacted, its chaos like a complex mixture of dark shadows. However, the void by itself had an indeterminate color, hence such a minor change wasn’t very noticeable.

The message was sent to him:

There’s danger, but this was also the opportunity for him to get closer to God.

Realizing the void was actually not defective, Zaphkiel heaved a sigh of relief. “Since we’ll be resuming our plans, I can only wait till we meet to inform them of Sandalphon’s death in order to prepare for potential danger.”

He recalled the three unanswered questions again and lamented, “Primordial Witches are really tricky to deal with...”

Chapter 308: Operation Start

Chapter 308: Operation Start

Zaphkiel retracted his tentacles of consciousness from Sandalphon's lair. His actual body within the body slowly got up from his crossed-legged seated posture.

The countless tentacles which made up his physical body wriggled ceaselessly, creating slight disturbances in the surrounding air. Dark and narrow strips flashed across like lightning and disappeared just as quickly.

In the next instant, he reached out his hand which assimilated into the void, and Zaphkiel vanished from his original spot.

According to Michael's letter, they were all required to head to where the covenant had been made: the birthplace of the Witch of Trees, Fraxinus, where some remaining elves gathered at present.

Now, these grounds would once again be used to fulfill the Path of the Flaming Sword's covenant.

And elsewhere, in an even more secret area, similar events were occurring concurrently. Melissa had arrived at the meeting location of the 7th Squad.

Knights of Secret Rite Tower were systematically split into assigned teams, listening to orders in obedient and silent fashion, standing by and ready to go.

Melissa was quick to locate the team she belonged to and made her way toward them.

As she had been the previous team leader, it ought to be her taking charge of the ten-man team. However, at this moment, it was clear that her team had undergone some temporary changes and the

position of team leader was currently held by Mylon, who was second only to her in the original team.

“Melissa, what are you doing here?”

Mylon, who was doing a roll call, was shocked when he saw Melissa approach and whispered when she got closer.

Melissa could vaguely sense that something wasn't right. But when she saw how the leader of her team had been changed and being questioned in this manner made her feel like an outsider. This annoyed her, to say the least.

Melissa couldn't help but retort, “Why can't I be here?”

She glanced around, recalling the words of the instructor and went on, “Wasn't this a mandatory order by the Council of Elders?”

Mylon faltered. Shaking his head, he gave a hesitant reply, “This mission was indeed a mandate issued by the Council of Elders. B-b-but everyone knows that you are Joseph's daughter and can now be considered to have special privileges.

“Moreover, the extreme enmity between Joseph and Wilde is well-known. It's clear the danger level has shot up significantly because this mission involves us facing Wilde's forces. How could Secret Rite Tower allow you to be put in danger?”

From Mylon's facial expressions, Melissa could immediately deduce the hidden meaning behind his words.

Melissa cut him off. “Since it's mandatory for every member of the 7th Squad to be involved, what's wrong with me being here since I'm a member of the squad?”

Mylon could only gape, unable to vocalize his thoughts. This was sound reasoning and he couldn't argue.

While everyone knew that Melissa would be transferred to the Intelligence Division, she was currently still here and the paperwork hadn't been processed yet. Thus, she was still a Combat Division personnel.

Since she was still part of the Combat Division, obeying commands of the higher-ups and taking part in battles were to be expected.

With this logic, it would appear that Mylon was making a big deal over nothing. Thus, he could only nod his head. “Alright. But I’m the interim team leader.”

“No problem, continue issuing your orders as a team leader would. I’m just an ordinary team member now,” said Melissa as she slotted into the ranks. “This is probably my very last mission. You will officially be team leader once my transfer to the Intelligence Division goes through.”

Mylon was somewhat panicked. “The team—”

“The team should’ve already finished their preparations. I am no longer team leader; you are. Do the roll call.” Melissa cut him off.

“Yes!” Mylon acknowledged instinctively.

Several members in the team began to burst out laughing, causing Mylon’s face to burn a bright scarlet. But when he saw Melissa smile along with the rest, he didn’t feel as embarrassed anymore.

Mylon’s blush had spread to his neck, but he was able to calm himself down. With a few words of reprimand, he managed to silence the others.

He continued with the roll call while also organizing his team before reporting full strength to the higher-ups.

Thus, as per norm, Melissa rejoined her team, though this time not as leader but an ordinary team member.

The 7th Squad consisted of a total of 20 teams. Ten members made up a team, and Melissa was part of Team 8.

Standing at the back of the team, Melissa caught sight of ‘Scarlet Lancer’ Vivian, one of the ten Great Radiant Knights.

As her title suggested, Vivian was clad in thick scarlet armor that wrapped tightly around her body. She wielded a three-meter long

spear and rode an ebony horse. A brown ponytail peeked out from the back of her helmet and her muscular arms hidden beneath her shoulder pads made her seem all the more intimidating and not like a regular woman.

Yet in truth, Melissa, who has seen Vivian's true persona, knew her as a heroic and beautiful woman that would occasionally show an alluring side.

As for the reason why Melissa knew so much, it was all thanks to Mr. 'Indomitable Sacred Flame' Joseph.

While Joseph's heart only belonged to his daughter and deceased wife, there were many that desired him.

While Vivian was giving her usual pre-battle speech, Melissa had thought back to the ceaseless Secret Rite Tower gossip by those adults out of boredom.

"And this time, we will return with unparalleled victory! Onwards!" Vivian raised her spear and roared.

The team members down below all shouted back "Victory!" in unison as magicians hired by Secret Rite Tower activated the teleportation array and sent the leading troops to the battlefield.

Every team had been given their own tasks from the start, and now all that was required was for everybody to perform their duties.

If they encountered leader members of the Corpse Devouring Sect, they would be left for Vivian to handle.

Melissa was already well-versed with the process of carrying out a mission, and she was now being transported to the destination along with her team.

The current target of this siege and suppression mission was a larger hideout of the Corpse Devouring Sect which was helmed by three Pandemonium-ranks.

One of them was the powerful hunter that followed Wilde and had the title 'Night Falcon.' His ability was at peak Pandemonium-rank,

hence Vivan was currently dispatched to deal with him.

Support us at Hosted Novel.

The other two were relatively typical Pandemonium-ranks. In fact, they were only slightly stronger than Melissa had been before she received Boss Lin's guidance; nothing noteworthy.

Under normal circumstances, a mission of this level wouldn't warrant a complete mobilization of a Secret Rite Tower squad. However, the Corpse Devouring Sect was a truly evil organization that utilized sacrifices to gain power.

Once people started dying, the situation could spiral out of control and Secret Rite Tower would suffer great losses. Learning from past mistakes, dealing with the Corpse Devouring Sect meeting them with sufficient strength.

"Be alert and follow the plan. Upon encountering a member of the Corpse Devouring Sect about to perform a sacrifice, make sure to kill them!"

Vivian barked out her parting orders, having already dived into the teleportation array.

"Yes!"

Everyone answered in unison on their communication devices. A secretive and tense operation had begun, and everybody was being methodically sent to 67th Avenue.

[It's been a while, Aunty Vivian.]

Vivian suddenly received a message on her private channel. She was already awaiting further orders and hence conveniently opened the message, yet her face paled when she saw it.

[Melissa?! Why are you here?? Damn-it!]

She hurriedly replied, [Where are you now?]

[I'm on scouting duty, so I'm already on 67th Avenue,] was

Melissa's reply.

Chapter 309: Death-match

Chapter 309: Death-match

Melissa, who was supposed to report to the Intelligence Division, is actually taking part in this operation?!

Upon learning this fact, Vivian instantly understood that someone within Secret Rite Tower was messing around!

Anyone would immediately realize the severity of this issue upon taking a moment to think about it. Melissa's presence on the battlefield was now like a ticking time bomb, and if no precautions were taken, it could set off the conflict between Wilde and Joseph, which had been dormant for the past two years but was now like a taut string on the verge of snapping.

This novel is available on Hosted Novel.

Moreover, the fight between the Corpse Devouring Sect and Secret Rite Tower was about to commence...

This was a battle that was bound to happen, just that it was now being brought forward.

But the ones behind the scenes surely had an ulterior motive. Perhaps they wanted to take advantage of the chaos to do certain things, just like the Magic Ovum Mirror.

These were uncontrollable factors and had to be stopped.

However, the top of Vivian's current worries was fear for Melissa's life.

After all, Melissa had already become something like family to her.

"Melissa, return immediately!"

Vivan couldn't be bothered about the battlefield command as she immediately used the emergency channel to issue instructions to

Melissa in a strict manner.

As this mission was still mainly about clearing the middle and lower level members of the Corpse Devouring Sect gathered here and the opposing Pandemonium-ranks had yet to appear, Vivan currently only had a subdued role to play and was in a safer spot at the back-line for the time being.

Melissa was stunned on her end but still replied, "Alright... I'll head back at once."

Unconditional obedience to superiors on the battlefield was one of the compulsory precepts for knights of Secret Rite Tower.

Even when in doubt, one must carry out one's orders first and wait till the battle was concluded before clarifying them with the superiors.

However, it was uncertain whether a superior would answer and there was also the risk of being punished for transgression of authority.

Vivian exhaled in relief when she heard Melissa's reply.

Thank goodness... The situation hasn't become too troublesome yet.

When Melissa returned, asking about who had sent her over was a must. Someone had definitely played a part here. Melissa would have been diligently doing the transfer paperwork back in the tower otherwise and not shown up here.

Moreover, the higher-ups had already approved Melissa not needing to take part in this operation some time ago.

Vivian's face slightly darkened at the thought of this, but chaotic sounds broke out over the comms, breaking her thoughts. She heard shouting, footsteps, fighting, and explosions.

There was a break in sound on Melissa's end before the young knight said, "I might be unable to return for the time being..."

With a sinking feeling in her heart, Vivian looked up into the

distance and sensed a rising aura among the crowd of transcendent beings along with the dissipation of the aetheric fluctuations of space-time disturbance.

Clearly, it must have been Wilde's contracted dream beast, Sky Wolf Grady, that had opened the rift in space-time and brought over a certain follower of Wilde's.

Compared to the two somewhat inferior Pandemonium-ranks, the source of this aura was a true 'Pandemonium' rank.

A transcendent being capable of causing panic in more than a thousand people was loosely defined as a Pandemonium-rank.

Yet a thousand ordinary mortals were also considered a thousand, whereas a thousand transcendent beings were a thousand as well.

While this comparison was somewhat exaggerated, it was evident that the person this aura came from was no longer a Pandemonium-rank in the universal definition.

At least the power level of a Great Radiant Knight and not any weaker than me.

Vivian had already weighed it in her mind.

Their worst fears had come true... What had arrived was unfortunately what they had prepared for—one of Wilde's four followers, a hunter that went by the moniker 'Night Falcon.'

"Huuu..."

Vivian exhaled and ordered, "Melissa, try your utmost to protect yourself. Ensuring your safety is the utmost priority."

Then, without waiting for Melissa's response, Vivian sat up straighter in her saddle. With one hand, she faced her three-meter-long spear in the direction of that aura while flicking her other wrist to tighten the reins, making both the woman and horse tense up like an arrow on a drawn bowstring.

Rumble!

An astonishing aura gathered like a whirlpool picking up steam around the female knight in scarlet armor atop her black stallion, brewing with enough power to crush everything standing in its way.

The stallion neighed, a wild red glint flashed in its eyes. At the moment its raised front hooves started to descend, an absolute power ripped through the air, causing the ground all around to crack and dent before it even hit the ground.

A circular wave of air blasted out all around, fragmenting the ground in a ten-meter radius and spreading dust in all directions. The remaining dissipating force still caused all other buildings around to collapse.

And at the same time, both the stallion and rider had vanished from the spot.

The two transformed into a rapier, a black and scarlet phantom that whistled with unimaginable speed and plowed an exaggerated furrow straight into the middle of the battlefield, cutting across everything as it hurtled toward the burial ground.

The burial ground of her enemies.

The Scarlet Lancer. That figure in red was the very nightmare of the enemies on the battlefield.

Night Falcon set his sights on Melissa the moment he was warped into position.

He had come for this very purpose.

Wilde had made it clear to him that this was Joseph's daughter and only weakness. As long as they could seize this opportunity, they would essentially be able to disrupt Joseph's position.

While it was unclear how this well-protected gem had made her way to the front lines, it was the perfect once-in-a-lifetime breakthrough for them.

Night Falcon extended his arms as if spreading his wings. Black feathers sprouted and he weaved into a cloak of darkness.

Like a falcon using the night as cover, the hunter, with a blade in hand, slayed several Secret Rite Tower knights as a warm-up in several leaps, his body dancing like it was an art-form of killing as split blood traced intermittent lines in the air.

Slash slash slash...

With one last flash, the image of Melissa's somewhat panicked figure reflected in his pupils as Night Falcon whirled and twisted in the air, about to make his strike with his bitingly cold blade.

Clang!

A spear in the hand of a scarlet rider bursting forth from nowhere collided with it.

BOOM!

Ripples of wind spread out from the epicenter, shattering the ground around.

The tall, spear-wielding female saw the unharmed Melissa out of the corner of her eye and let out a huge sigh of relief. Then, she glared at the hunter before her with a burning gaze.

She announced loudly, "Cruel evil-doers of the Corpse Devouring Sect, justice has come, and your end is now here!"

Night Falcon sneered. "The light of the Lord is like the moon in the sky, and you are like mere fireflies. Those who dare go against the Corpse Devouring Sect are the ones who are really in trouble and don't know it!"

The eyes of these two adversaries met, just like their weapons.

A deadly fight between the two representatives had formally begun.

Chapter 310: Key

Chapter 310: Key

Bang bang bang! Boom —

Two blurred figures, one black and one scarlet, like light and shadows moving at high speeds, constantly crisscrossing both in the air and on the ground, creating shock-waves each time they collided.

In the blast waves of scattered dust, buildings on the street collapsed, sinking with the broken ground.

Fortunately, this place was occupied by the Corpse Devouring Sect for some time and there weren't many ordinary residents. Moreover, at the beginning of the battle, Secret Rite Tower's knights had used the Truth Union's product of alchemy 'Dream Creator' at the beginning of the battle.

Despite the kiddo name, this machine wasn't actually used to create dreams. On the contrary, it was powered by a philosopher's stone to support a simulated dream domain—an unusual domain at the junction of reality and dream eroded by dream whenever a dream beast descended.

In this way, everything within the battlefield was in a 'semi-dream' state. And as long as the Dream Creator was shut off at the end, the reality that was affected to a shallow degree would automatically be restored.

Of course, if the degree of erosion to the real environment was too great or the subject's main consciousness disappeared or died... that subject would never be able to return to their original state.

This was a very dangerous machine.

But thanks to this invention, the knights of Secret Rite Tower could go all out when fighting without worrying too much about all else,

just like the exchange between Night Falcon and Vivian on the battlefield.

The two peak Pandemonium-ranks fought each other in full force, creating a terrifying momentum that, in the eyes of the average person, was almost the same as that of Destructive-rank.

Melissa, though retreating gradually, did not leave the battlefield.

Sure enough, it still happened... There was something wrong with that instructor! She was inwardly frightened and gritted her teeth in shock.

Melissa was certain that the hunter from Corpse Devouring Sect with the code-name 'Night Falcon' was coming for her directly!

In addition, the giant silver-furred dog that had shown itself vaguely in the space-time fissure was clearly Wilde's Sky Wolf... In other words, Wilde already knew of her presence and had sent his men over to attack her!

If this mission had really been issued by the Council of Elders, it was impossible that Melissa's status hadn't been taken into account by them.

Although she had her doubts at the start, Melissa had reckoned that the Council of Elders had already accounted for everything. For example, scouting showed that there were minimal life forces in the hideout, which meant that the issue could be settled fast with a quick retreat without the higher-ups of the Corpse Devouring Sect being alerted.

But now it turned out that the Corpse Devouring Sect's response was not only swift, but Wilde's immediate subordinates had been dispatched as well.

Those measures that Melissa had expected didn't exist at all.

If that instructor is compromised, then this mission might not even exist at all... It will take some time for the Council of Elders's response, and even more time will be required for Father who is at the Truth Union to be informed...

Melissa felt a sense of extreme danger and stared nervously at the two streaks flying across the battlefield.

But as she stared at them, Melissa couldn't help but feel a little fascinated as she observed this battle that was close to Destructive-ranks. Small golden runes constantly flickered like data streams in her eyes, naturally slowing down the actions of the two figures that only seemed like streaks in the eyes of ordinary folk as she began to analyze the flow and composition of the aether around them movement by movement.

From surface to the in-depth levels, from appearance to essence.

Melissa had experienced quite a number of actual combats. She grew up in Secret Rite Tower as a 'second generation officer' and had a talent in fighting. She was also a quick learner and had great potential, valued and trained from a young age, so she didn't lack actual combat opportunities.

And now, she had this ability to see through all 'origin.'

If she were to practice the powerful fighting skills displayed by the two, Melissa was sure to grasp around seventy to eighty percent.

However, at this moment, she wasn't focused on that because after seven days of confinement, Melissa had realized that learning all these superficial things would just be getting ahead of herself.

Currently, she possessed the key that could open all doors.

But all these dazzling doors were obscuring her vision. In fact, there was only one door she needed to open.

Those permutations and combinations, constructs and breakdowns, all of it was just executing the same instructions...

The battle in front of her eyes was becoming more intense and heated.

Melissa's expression gradually became blank, and even her concern for Vivian disappeared. Her fingers moved from time to time as if she was grasping or trying to control something.

“Found her! It’s really her! Catch her and we’ll be greatly rewarded!”

A voice sounded from behind Melissa.

Two men in long black robes were watching the young red-haired knight with an avaricious glint in their eyes.

These two were Pandemonium-ranks that had been stationed in this hideout. They used to be black magicians but now had been taken in by the Corpse Devouring Sect.

On the battlefield behind them, a huge monster made up of broken limbs and body parts was fighting many Secret Rite Tower knights at once and holding them back.

This was the result of their sacrifice to the gods. Instead of increasing their power, they chose to summon a familiar for the purpose of searching for Joseph’s daughter.

Melissa appeared to be stunned, as if frightened by the battle that started suddenly.

The two black-robed men exchanged glances and drew out sacrificial knives from under their robes.

The Truth Union, Machine Loop.

Tip-tap tip-tap

The sound of footsteps echoed through the empty metal corridors.

Support us at Hosted Novel.

A group of knights led by Joseph followed behind Andrew, Vice-Chairman of the Truth Union.

Part of the laboratories that had been destroyed by the detonation of a philosopher’s stone sometime back had been completely repaired. Laboratories on both sides were mostly separated by

transparent glass, allowing all sorts of obscure instruments and equipment as well as the busy laboratory staff inside to be seen clearly.

Andrew glanced back at Joseph and casually introduced, “These are our deep-most laboratories where the most advanced projects we have are carried out, such as the Dream Creator we recently supplied to you people.”

A scholar in a white coat approaching from the opposite end bowed to Andrew and greeted in a manner of utmost respect, “Chairman!”

Joseph’s eyes trailed this passerby for a moment. This was already the seventh or eighth person they had encountered that had practically treated Andrew as if he were the Truth Union Chairman...

Moreover, something seemed off with the tone of these scholars; hints of fanaticism and reverence, unlike the cold, rational tone that scholars usually had.

This was the sort of fanaticism that could previously only be felt from the members of the Truth Union’s most extreme ‘Truth-seeker’ faction....

Now it had extended to the vast majority of scholars Joseph had seen today.

Joseph met Andrew’s eyes calmly and said, “Is it alright for you to show us the Truth Union’s most confidential information like this?”

He was not very interested in this Vice-Chairman of the Truth Union. Although the latter’s irrational behavior shown toward the bookstore had already been proven to be the workings of a mole, Joseph didn’t have a good impression of this sort of guy who was hypocritical, pretentious, and a so-called ‘gentleman.’

...It somehow reminded him of Wilde.

Andrew returned a casual smile. “The Truth Union and Secret Rite Tower are allies with years of mutual cooperation, so naturally, we have to give you the highest trust. This time, I’ve invited Sir

Indomitable Sacred Flame to help clean up the most secret forbidden area of the Machine Loop.

“In comparison, this so-called top secret is nothing, and I absolutely believe in the character of Secret Rite Tower’s knights.”

He then paused before adding with a smirk, “Moreover... You guys won’t be able to understand all these anyway...”

Joseph: “...”

Chapter 311: Idol

Chapter 311: Idol

Everything you said in front was just bullshit and the last sentence is what you truly think, eh?

Joseph gritted his teeth and couldn't help clenching his fists as he stared at the smiling Andrew.

Even if all the details of the processes were placed in full view, you illiterates wouldn't understand what they are, so the whole lab is literally safe as hell —that was definitely what this fellow was trying to say!

But Joseph had to admit... Andrew's implied meaning was spot-on.

Even if they were allowed to go into the laboratory and observe them up close and even come in contact with those stuff, the knights of Secret Rite Tower probably wouldn't be able to understand what those instruments were actually for...

That ugly mug of Andrew's along with that irksome superiority complex in front of him showed Joseph exactly why the Truth Union was irreplaceable.

If the Rolle Resource Development held a monopoly on resources, then the Truth Union had a monopoly on knowledge.

And not just any knowledge but top of the line, high-end knowledge whose core was absolutely incomprehensible to transcendent beings of all other fields.

The scholars of the Truth Union definitely had the right to boast.

From the top to bottom, transcendent beings had benefited. Low-end products that were in the midst of development were also pushed out as well, drastically changing the lives of ordinary folk.

Even more frightening was that the Truth Union didn't just have a monopoly on knowledge but also on the people who created this

knowledge.

While the Truth Union did not even have any Supreme-rank scholars, there was no doubt about the tremendous influence they had on the entire region of Norzin.

Naturally, Joseph would not be so calculative just because of the other party's bit of arrogance. After all, he couldn't just give the Vice-Chairman of the Truth Union a punch to the face.

If he were to do that, then the Truth Union and Secret Rite Tower would immediately go to war.

Fortunately, Andrew was also a person who knew how to recognize boundaries, so he chuckled and said, "Just kidding. I hope Sir Indomitable Sacred Flame won't get angry over this. Otherwise, this feeble scholar's body of mine wouldn't be able to survive a punch from you."

Joseph narrowed his eyes and chuckled as well. "While I do wish I could do it... Given your current status, wouldn't I just be blown to bits by the Aether Annihilation Cannon before I can even do anything, eh?"

He watched as yet another passing scholar saluted Andrew respectfully. His words held meaning—there were only two ways for the Aether Annihilation Cannon to be activated. The first was for the upper echelons of the Truth Union scholars to convene a meeting and vote collectively to select a commander, like how they previously dealt with the Rain God. The second was for the Chairman herself to give the order, which could circumvent the first process.

In Joseph's view, Andrew's ambition was clear as day.

Chairman Maria had disappeared for several months without any news, and Andrew seemed to have turned the Truth Union into his own... The word 'vice' in Vice-Chairman could basically be non-existent.

Moreover, something seemed to be off with these scholars.

Although Joseph's purpose for this visit wasn't to investigate how the Truth Union was like, but out of instinctive intuition, he still felt a hint of something strange.

Andrew remained composed as if he completely missed the meaning of it and continued to lead the way calmly. "Sir Joseph is really humorous. Quite a number of scholars under me are members of Sir's fan-club. When the time comes, I'm only afraid that the cannon will turn around and aim at me first once I give the order."

His tone was casual and relaxed, but Joseph could sense the hint of sarcasm.

As everyone knew, having a fan club was mostly for 'idols,' and an 'idol' as a thing had a literal meaning of just being a wooden puppet with glossy human skin.

Was this a sarcastic reference to Joseph's apparent glitz and glamour but the reality was that he was being manipulated?

Presently, the only ones that could control him were the Council of Elders...

And in reality, when thinking more along these lines, wasn't he actually being manipulated by them right now?

Defeating Oswald to regain the seat of a Great Radiant Knight was a deliberate arrangement of the Council of Elders, and to fully cooperate with the bookstore in order to befriend and please Boss Lin had also been an order by them.

Therefore, was Andrew giving a warning, or was it a provocation?

Joseph followed after the Vice-Chairman in silence while staring at his back. Though he wasn't all too familiar with this fellow, Joseph had past interactions with him due to transactions in intelligence and information.

In his impression, this old Casanova definitely didn't have this sort of motive.

So, what was it that got him to allow the Truth Union to undergo

such change?

While Joseph contemplated, Andrew, who was leading the way, halted and said, "We are here. Ahead of us is the restricted area of Machine Loop that has been sealed away."

Joseph looked up to survey it.

At the end of the corridor was a huge metal door, carved with dense runes extending from the center in all directions, flashing with light that was neither bright nor dim. There was also a depression in the center of the door, seemingly a slot for something.

A short teenager was waiting by the door and immediately greeted Andrew when he saw him.

"Hood, is everything ready?" Andrew asked.

Hood raised his arm, showing off the philosopher's stone in his hand, and grinned. "Fresh out of the oven!"

He pursed his lips and muttered, "This is the first time I had to refine such a high quality philosopher's stone... And it had to match all the runic pathways on this door. Thankfully, there was full support from the laboratories, and resources from other experiments were diverted over temporarily, which made it possible with just half a month's delay."

He then rolled his eyes and grumbled, "So the original key was destroyed. What a bother."

Joseph raised his eyebrows as he observed the teenager who was probably slightly younger than Melissa.

A high quality philosopher's stone. This was the mark of a Destructive-rank scholar...

This novel is available on Hosted Novel.

And from the sound of things, this philosopher's stone was the key to unlock this door, therefore requiring a more complex internal composition, more so than an ordinary one.

Yet this youth had spoken in such a relaxed manner. What others took entire lifetimes without achieving was just reduced to a half-month delay according to him.

Andrew did the introduction, “This is Hood, Chairman Maria’s nephew, leader of the ‘Wisdom-Seekers,’ and is currently the only second Destructive-rank scholar in the Truth Union.”

Joseph thought that there his ears were playing tricks on him.

When had another Destructive-rank emerged in the Truth Union?

And since this was Maria’s nephew, that ruled out the possibility of special methods to impersonate his appearance. This was truly a teenager... But, a teenage Destructive-rank scholar?

Was this some kind of dystopian virtual production?

Noticing Joseph’s horrified look, Hood grinned and shrugged. “It’s not solely refined by me, and I can’t be exactly considered Destructive-rank yet, but I’m getting there.”

Andrew waved him on. “Alright, the exact evaluation will be arranged in a few days, so we should make full use of our time now.”

Hood grunted an acknowledgment, then stood on his toes and placed the philosopher’s stone into the depression in the door and began.

The runes on the door dulled for a moment, then blazed with light and began to disintegrate into particles from the center that floated all around. A dark passage appeared on the other side, vaguely revealing some abandoned laboratories arranged on either side of the passageway.

Joseph’s heart skipped a beat.

Hood?

He’d heard of this name before!

Claude has once mentioned it...

One night, Chairman Maria's nephew, Hood, had barged into the bookstore and was caught by Boss Lin, and Claude had been the one sent to deal with it.

Chapter 312: You Are Impure

That's right. Hood. It's him.

If that's the case, it's logical since Boss Lin has that sort of power indeed... The power to transform an unassuming second generation scholar into a great one.

Just that I never imagined it would happen. From what I know, it's likely that he offended Boss Lin, so why was he helped instead? Furthermore, it seems like he's gotten more benefits than others.

For instance, Ji Zhixiu was currently one of the earliest recorded patrons of the bookstore, yet she's only recently hit peak Pandemonium-rank. Not only was her progress gradual, she has yet to succeed in ascending to Destructive-rank.

And Hood has somehow reached heights unfathomable by ordinary scholars.

From the analysis report of the Logistics Division, although Boss Lin doesn't mention this, the extent of help he is willing to provide for a customer is actually separated by different levels. As for the specifics, he will first have to determine the price the customer is willing to pay.

An example was Joseph himself. He had only regained his powers and was granted the opportunity to ascend to Supreme-rank only because he had offered the demon sword to Boss Lin as well as providing several instances of help.

Vincent was another case study. The price this individual had paid was a rather complicated one. It could be said that Vincent lost every single bit of his normalcy, and it could even be said that he was turned into a tool of Boss Lin's. However, the price he paid was great, and hence he directly ascended to Supreme-rank and took charge of a new faith.

Ji Zhixiu might have made contact with the bookstore at an earlier time, but the fact was that the price she paid was on a smaller scale,

so she didn't receive that much benefit.

What price did Hood pay to be able to obtain such power?

At the moment, Joseph had no answer at all.

Having mulled over it for a while, Joseph returned to his senses. He stopped and turned around at the doorway to first reorganize the team he brought along, re-emphasize the task at hand as well as getting them to make preparations.

Then, he would need to bring some of his men along to follow Andrew and Hood into the innermost heart of Norzin.

Claude had yet to recover from his severe injuries sustained during the previous incident with Oswald and was still recuperating, hence his absence on the current mission.

Claude's supposed workload had to be all borne by Joseph at present.

Just the thought of this made Joseph's rage and resentment toward Wilde burn even more intensely. But the more it grew, the more he had to suppress that hatred and smite it into a burning sword.

However, in the past few days, yet another notion had resounded in the depths of his heart.

When their paths last crossed, Wilde mentioned that the reason he'd sought Oswald's soul was to repair a gargoyle he had previously gifted to Boss Lin. On top of that, he had even referred to Boss Lin as his 'Lord.'

This also meant that Boss Lin was aware of Wilde's actions, and he could have very well been the one to suggest it.

Indeed, after the follow-up investigation and Carolyn's testimony, it was proven that Oswald was a mole planted by the Path of the Flaming Sword for many years.

If this was supposedly all according to Boss Lin's plan, the outcome showed that he actually treated Secret Rite Tower really well.

However, from Joseph's point of view, the entire process was agonizingly troubling.

Wilde appeared to be helping Secret Rite Tower under the guise of Boss Lin's will when in fact he harbored malicious intent toward Joseph and was taking advantage of the situation to get his revenge!

If it were anyone else, the whole incident would have ended the moment Oswald had been finished off.

Yet, out of everyone, the bookstore owner had to send someone who hated Joseph to the core.

He transformed Oswald into a colossally powerful monster, causing Secret Rite Tower to lose a number of knights and also severely endangering the life of Joseph's only disciple. In the end, before taking his leave, Wilde even dared to triumphantly state that he was aiding Secret Rite Tower.

All of a sudden, Joseph felt that he was more awake than ever before.

A revelation dawned upon him: why would a God care about the views of insignificant beings?

Perhaps, in the eyes of Boss Lin, things had worked out perfectly. But to Joseph, this was all a denotation of chaos.

This wasn't a malevolent sort of chaos; it was simply chaos of the purest form.

And after seeing the rise of the Corpse Devouring Sect, Joseph's thoughts became all the more clear.

If Wilde addressed Boss Lin as 'Lord,' it would mean the 'Lord' of the evil sect founded by the black magician would naturally be the bookstore owner by the name of Lin Jie.

The atrocities committed by disciples of that sect, be it blood sacrifices or other heinous behaviors, were technically under the acquiescence of the bookstore. In fact, the bookstore might even

have been encouraging such actions.

Secret Rite Tower had caught wind of rumors about how the Corpse Devouring Sect addressed their lord as the 'Propagator of the Corpse Devouring Sect' and 'Author of the Corpse Devouring Sect's Scriptures.' All of it coincided exactly with the bookstore's recluse.

So, according to those rumors, there was quite a high possibility that the teachings of the Corpse Devouring Sect had been written by Boss Lin!

If so—Joseph dared not to think about it—what would he make of Boss Lin now?

The sense of justice in him seemingly wanted to voice out, but for some appalling reasons, he found himself mute.

"Sir Indomitable Sacred Flame, do you know why I specially asked for you?"

Having avoided several dangerous experimental areas and killing a number of strange mutated dream creatures, Andrew abruptly threw out this question as they arrived at the gates of a section that seemed to be surrounded by tall iron fences resembling barbed thorns.

Joseph glanced behind him; the knights he had brought along had kept a distance between them and the three-man group ahead. But if they wanted to, they could easily listen in.

He's probably not going to say anything confidential, then.

Joseph glanced at Andrew and asked, "Why?"

Andrew replied with a chuckle, "Because we're all patrons of the bookstore. In a certain sense, we have practically gone beyond being best partners in an organization, and naturally, we should be placing our trust in each other."

Joseph hadn't expected him to be so direct.

He looked ahead and saw Hood currently opening the fences.

“Machine Loop is the Truth Union’s top secret area in the Truth Union. Even if outsiders cannot comprehend anything they see, it absolutely mustn’t be shown to anyone from other organizations.

“The aforementioned reasons for seeking Sir out were all a bluff. There is just one true reason—the bookstore is the bridge of our trust that allows us to align our views.

“But the moment I truly laid eyes on you, Sir, I discovered I might have been slightly mistaken. Though I can still place my trust in you, I cannot maintain it unconditionally.”

Joseph’s eyes narrowed. “Why is that?”

“Although we are all ones who’ve entered the bookstore—me, you, Hood, or even Wilde—we are all customers, yet you’re different.”

Andrew turned to face him, eyes sunken, and spoke in a low voice, “You’re impure.”

“It’s opened!” Ahead of them, Hood suddenly raised his voice before he was promptly cut off.

Everyone turned to look at his direction, and all were shocked by the sight before them.

A dazzling light flashed across, causing everyone to either involuntarily shut or cover their eyes.

This was a huge, complex structure resembling a beehive. Standing at an impressive height and width, blinding white balls of light filled the entire ceiling. Metallic frames and grinding gears connected all of the platforms and rooms together. What’s more, the entire building was filled with people.

They were in the masses, either walking about or just working. All of them had donned white clothing, and every single one had cold, numb expressions!

Chapter 313: They Never Left

Every one of them had dull eyes and faces devoid of emotion as they traversed through this convoluted hive-esque construct, busy with their own tasks. There wasn't any communication whatsoever, only silence.

It was almost as if they were not humans but rather robots directed by their input commands.

The knights behind Joseph exchanged glances, clearly befuddled.

These knights wouldn't have such a huge reaction had it been the scene of an intense battlefield filled with carnage greeting them. However, the contrasting eerie and quiet depiction in front filled them with a sense of dread.

"What's all this?" Joseph whispered the only question on his mind.

He had previously made some wild guesses about what he might find in the depths of the Truth Union's Machine Loop.

Dead zones shrouded by poisonous reagents as a result of failed experiments, perhaps mechanical equipment that had gone haywire, or the entire place coated by dust as a result of many years of abandonment.

Never once did it come across his mind that there would be a complete architectural marvel of such complexity lying just beneath the Truth Union. And here, it was as if there was a whole other world.

This was simply mind-boggling!

There actually existed a well-managed laboratory of such a scale in the area the Truth Union had always kept sealed, so much so that the key had been lost from a lack of use. In fact, this place didn't look that much different from any other of the large laboratories in the Truth Union.

So, did it mean that these people here were parasites? Existing in secret within Machine Loop for decades, centuries, or even several millennia?

And all this time, the scholars of the Truth Union were oblivious to it and had been sharing the space with these things, just separated by a wall.

Just the thought of it was enough to leave one shivering with goosebumps.

Were they enemies, or remnants of a lost era?

While awaiting Andrew's reaction, Joseph swiftly surveyed the surroundings. Without any prompting, the knights behind also started to fan out, forming a circle to protect the two scholars that lacked battle prowess.

Joseph's eyebrows rose. His heart raced the more he observed.

Firstly, these 'things' only seemed to have appearances that resembled that of a human but bore no other similarities otherwise.

Since the party entered, Joseph could also ascertain that these things could have easily seen them, yet it appeared like they took no notice nor had any reaction, continuing to mind their own business as if Joseph and his party were nonexistent.

It seemed apparent that these things had no mind of their own.

Aside from that, all the equipment and constructs, including the floor, were surprisingly spotless despite the timeworn status.

This pretty much meant that these things weren't created a long time ago and they were frequently in use.

These were two factors that were supposedly contradictory, yet if put together logically, cleared up many questions.

However a new problem had now arisen—there was an unknown organization leeching off the Truth Union in their basement and had been exploiting the restricted area for an extended period of

time.

They couldn't have possibly been self-sufficient in isolation down here; meaning that besides the path opened up by Hood, there definitely existed any way which led to the surface!

Therefore, a very probable conclusion could be established: there was definitely a mole within the Truth Union receiving these 'things' and also providing them with necessary aid and resources!

Joseph's mind went to work, connecting the dots regarding the previous mole incident in the Truth Union, and understood what was going on at once.

Andrew must've known about everything here, or rather, he at least knew there that there were people in this area. Moreover, his objective for bringing Joseph down here was to get the Great Radiant Knight's help to capture the mole. This had nothing to do with clearing up a dangerous area.

Dammit, this asshole in a suit definitely didn't have good intentions. He's basically treating Secret Rite Tower as his cavalry! Joseph cursed in silence.

The party temporarily scattered and retreated to a corner.

While those humanoid beings had temporarily disregarded their existence, the party couldn't place their hopes on the enemy being blind and deaf.

They still had to prepare for the worst.

"Homunculi," Andrew took a deep breath in before giving a firm answer. "These are all homunculi made with philosopher's stones as their cores."

Joseph whipped his head round and stared at him. "Homunculi? The 'Clay Idol' Project you guys were in charge of?"

Andrew nodded with a somewhat complex expression. "To date, all our products of the 'Clay Idol' Project can all be considered failures."

“So these ones here are successful products?” Joseph pointed at the emotionless humanoids, having instantly picked up the hidden meaning in Andrew’s words.

“Yes, but also no,” was Andrew’s reply.

Joseph really wanted to punch this fella on the spot, but ultimately restrained himself from doing so. “You better explain yourself,” he warned.

“What determines these homunculi as a success is the perfect integration with the philosopher’s stone in their bodies; they practically have no flaws.

“Aether flows unrestricted within their bodies, and I believe you can sense that. Their degree of resonance has reached terrifyingly new heights. Given the opportunity to learn and imitate, they could immediately become powerful magicians, or exceptional scholars.”

Indeed, given this point, these were created specimens that couldn’t be any more perfect.

Seemingly failing to notice Joseph’s murderous gaze, Andrew continued without much care, “As for why I deemed them as failures, it’s because they are deprived of consciousness.

“Homunculi without a mind of their own are merely useful tools that can’t be labeled as a being.”

The look on his face got more unreadable. “However, I feel that this failure was a deliberate one.

“Which means that the creators of these homunculi didn’t actually lack skill but, on the contrary, just needed them as tools?” Andrew muttered a rhetorical question, repeating it for Joseph’s sake on purpose.

Joseph was in disbelief.

If this were truly the case, it would mean the ones behind this harnessed a power and boldness much more fearsome than they originally believed.

He had heard about the Truth Union's homunculi project before, as well as the unimaginable amount of resources required by the Truth Union to support it. And now, seeing this many perfect homunculi before him meant that the resources required for such an undertaking were way more.

Expending so much yet only utilizing the products as service tools is just insane extravagance. Imagine how much better they would be if they were nurtured to become tools of battle.

Such a thought came into Joseph's mind.

Unless... the creator was a Supreme-rank and didn't require these insignificant creations to aid him.

"What's more, their original form..." said Andrew as he glanced at a passing homunculus in a white coat, "...are the same as the three perfect T1383 specimens that went missing after the laboratory in Machine Loop was attacked and destroyed.

"Ever since that attack, we had the assumption that those specimens had been delivered somewhere else by the moles, hence we launched a Norzin-wide search that proved fruitless till now.

"It turns out that we were all wrong. They never actually left Machine Loop."

Chapter 314: Justice, A Concern

Chapter 314: Justice, A Concern

They never left Machine Loop!

A chill ran down Joseph's spine.

A huge, complex operation had been ongoing in the core of the Truth Union for years, decades, or maybe even centuries, yet the latter showed no signs of being aware of it.

Funnily enough, the Truth Union had expended heavy manpower for operating their 'Clay Idol' Project, yet their most successful products were stolen from under their noses, exploited and replicated in mass.

This was an organization that supposedly held unrivaled status in Norzin and were so powerful they were known to bend the forces of nature. Yet, the Truth Union had been played like a fiddle and would be the greatest laughingstock if this information got out!

That would mean that the moles within the Truth Union were affiliated with the 'Path of the Flaming Sword.' This gigantic parasitic nest within Machine Loop was probably the base of operations for the moles planted within the Truth Union.

The enemy they were always looking for had been underneath them the whole time.

Perhaps the enemy had even been laughing as they watched from the shadows over the past few busy months.

As a knight of Secret Rite Tower, Joseph was technically an outsider to the Truth Union, yet he couldn't help but be thoroughly shaken by it.

One could hardly imagine what was going through the minds of Andrew and Hood—both were scholars of the Truth Union—right now.

More so now that the aether surveillance network always utilized by the Truth Union had been completely reduced to a mere decoration.

The scholars who bragged about being able to control the whole of Norzin had just been given a rude wake-up call. Smacked hard with a dose of reality and swollen with shame, who could blame them if they exploded with rage?

Support us at Hosted Novel.

Yet when Joseph's eyes darted to gauge Andrew's expressions, he realized the Vice-Chairman seemed much mellower than what he had expected.

Andrew did narrow his eyes, revealing his conflicted feelings on the situation. Amongst a plethora of emotions, he mainly felt surprised, defeated, contemplative, and amazed.

However, besides all that, he surprisingly followed up with an expression that screamed 'Indeed, it's like this.'

He wasn't actually aware of it long beforehand but rather was informed in advance via certain channels. And now that he personally bore witness, he could finally verify the credibility of it.

It wasn't just Andrew; even Hood was privy to the information.

Their eyes didn't reveal any signs of disbelief. Instead, they sparkled with hints of rapt fanaticism.

It was as if another entity had replaced the Truth Union. In fact, it seemed to have become their new knowledge and information, becoming a symbol of their belief. This unwavering and deep-rooted belief even desensitized the unprecedented sight before them.

Certain thoughts started to race through Joseph's mind.

Unless... This is another one of Boss Lin's doings?

Was it Boss Lin who told them that moles from the Path of the Flaming Sword were actually hiding within Machine Loop?

Wilde regarded Boss Lin as 'Lord' and created the 'Corpse Devouring Sect' in his stead; what about Andrew and the others, then?

After interacting with Boss Lin and witnessing his almighty omniscience, did they also end up like Wilde? Original scholars, yet their belief and faith in knowledge has now been shifted onto Boss Lin instead?

This concept got clearer the more Joseph thought about it, and at the same time, he finally deduced the reasoning behind the strange feeling he previously had.

Hood was originally an extreme 'Truth-Seeker,' and there's no way he's started following a new belief. And those scholars that passed by were full of awe for Andrew, but their gazes didn't seem like mere respect but more like fanatics chasing after their leader!

The Truth Union isn't what it used to be. And, it may already have become the source of a new religion that believes in a specific entity. This must all be because of their contact with Boss Lin and his bookstore!

"So that's what it is," the enlightened Joseph murmured softly.

Andrew whipped his head toward the old knight. "What's wrong? Did you come to realize something?"

"I understand now. I've realized why you said I was different and impure," muttered Joseph.

"Oh?" Andrew implored.

He scanned Joseph's expression and gave a slight nod. "Looks like you've indeed understood why," he affirmed in an undertone.

"Since that's the case, allow me to be frank with you. Your heart is

still occupied with other things, other concerns... But for us, in a way, we've already dedicated everything to the only being in our hearts, just that our methods might differ.

"Because of this, it's only a matter of time before you become our enemy," Andrew announced with certainty.

"Our?" Joseph gave an indignant sigh and murmured, "Which means I've already become your foe."

Andrew flashed a grin. "You really did get it."

"However," he announced sharply, "at least for now, we still have to rely on one another to battle. Else, I'm afraid none of us can leave the premises."

Joseph was about to nod, but a rumble and crash of a closing mechanism resounded from behind him.

Everyone was alarmed; they turned to look and discovered that the door they had entered from had been shut!

"Fitting words indeed. None of you will be leaving."

A faint voice could be heard coming from above, resounding through every nook and cranny of this metal hive before congregating once more.

By the time the members of the party had collected themselves and turned back to look, they realized that all the homunculi that had been minding their own business previously were now collectively staring back at them!

This unsettling atmosphere prompted all of the Secret Rite Tower knights to draw their swords.

However, the enemy was nowhere to be found because none of the homunculi showed any signs of hostility or blood-lust. It was just countless dull and lifeless eyes simply gazing at them.

The source of that voice also couldn't be located, but following it was an immense yet intangible pressure.

With gritted teeth, the knights gripped their swords tightly till the knuckles turned white as abject terror filled their eyes.

Of course, it was a Supreme-rank...

Joseph's heart sank as his body abruptly burst into white flames, releasing an aetheric force to prepare himself for combat. It was only then did the knights behind him sigh in slight relief.

Joseph, however, didn't dare relax. Not even for a tiny bit. Dammit, the enemy is obviously going easy on us. It's no pseudo-god we are facing this time but an actual Supreme-rank!

We definitely will not be stepping out of this place if we are careless.

He drew his focus, attempting to determine where the aetheric energies were congregating in order to pinpoint the location of this Supreme-rank.

But the truth was, his efforts were all in vain. Who would've expected the enemy's hideout was contained within the Truth Union's own territory? Everyone in the group had been caught off guard.

At this moment, a scholarly figure with gold-rimmed glasses and hands in the pockets of his white coat appeared on a raised platform in front of them.

The most eye-catching feature about him was the bloody black cavity at the side of his cranium, where the flesh inside could practically be seen squirming about.

As he appeared, the overwhelming pressure that blanketed the area also dissipated. Looking down condescendingly at all of them, he waved a hand and smirked. "I'm just kidding, there's no need to be so nervous."

However, both Andrew and Hood lost their previous cool, crying out in unison as they saw the scholar's frame.

"Ymir!"

Hood's eyes were wide as saucers. It didn't matter how attuned the young scholar's mind was, for seeing a legendary figure from the textbooks appear in person was an extremely shocking occurrence. "Ethereal Wisdom' Grantham Ymir?"

"That's right, guilty as charged."

It was Raziel who showed up. With a wide smile, he announced, "Congratulations, all of you. You have found the true Truth Union."

Chapter 315: No Brain

The true Truth Union?!

Astonishment crept up Andrew's and Hood's faces when they heard what had been said.

The hint about enemies from the Path of the Flaming Sword lying under Machine Loop from Boss Lin had already been proved a set fact, and the purpose of the two scholars coming here was to find them, which was why they hadn't been too surprised at first.

However, the appearance of 'Ethereal Wisdom' Grantham Ymir was downright creepy.

It was as if the two of them were seeing a ghost.

This face from the textbooks suddenly appearing before them was like a joke that average students usually cracked—how a great man of science that should have been dead for thousands of years suddenly jumped out of his coffin and appeared before them.

It was both astonishing and frightening.

And the words "the true Truth Union" had caused everything they knew about their own organization to come crashing down. Who was Ymir, one might ask?

Ymir was the founder and first Chairman of the Truth Union, creator of the steel city Norzin, originator of the school of scholars. At the same time, he was also the first Supreme-rank scholar, known as 'the source of all earthly knowledge,' 'a being of true wisdom,' and 'Ethereal Wisdom.'

In other words, Andrew and Hood came here hoping to catch the thief in their own house but ended up catching an ancient predecessor.

Moreover, the other party had told them that their house was fake,

and where they were now was the true one... The thief had claimed himself as the true owner.

Even if he really were Ymir, then he was a fake.

The Truth Union didn't need a scholar that had vanished a thousand years ago to assume leadership to contract them. At present, the spread of the 'Wisdom-Seeker' faction internally enjoyed great success, and it would just be a matter of time before the Truth Union will become whole. If it were known that Ymir had appeared here, all that would come out of this would be unnecessary trouble and division.

Moreover, Ymir had appeared here under these circumstances. By joining the dots, it was clear that he was a part of the Path of the Flaming Sword and also their enemy.

The Truth Union absolutely mustn't acknowledge this former founding father that had turned bad. But before Andrew could say anything, Joseph spoke first.

Staring at Raziel above him, the Great Radiant Knight sneered, "So, you are Ymir just because you claim to be him?

"If so, then the identity of that great being who is long dead is way too cheap. Any Supreme-rank changing his appearance can claim to be Ymir, then. Who would believe that?"

...Just being a Supreme-rank isn't cheap! Andrew couldn't help giving a silent jibe.

Even so, he still gave a stony-faced nod, expressing his agreement to what had been said.

However, Joseph also realized that if this person before them was truly Ymir as he self-proclaimed and was a member of the Path of the Flaming Sword, then the Truth Union would irrevocably be shaken...

In spite of that, what seemed like a direct jibe by Joseph was actually a linguistic trick. For example, those words "Great being who is long dead" both doubted the identity, yet at the same time

elevated the other party's status. If the other party was truly Ymir, then logically, he wouldn't be that mad.

It's really no coincidence that Sir Indomitable Sacred Flame can have such a large fan base... thought Andrew to himself as he cast a glance at Raziel.

Now... All that's left is to see that fellow's response.

Raziel maintained his unassuming smile and shrugged. "I'm not Ymir, if you all deem that I'm not him. Ymir is a name that has already become rooted in history as a decadent symbol that is recited over and over. Indeed, he's not much of a great person."

He continued on, "I go by Raziel now, just an academic seeking out interesting things to research and nothing more."

Joseph kept his vigilance up, scanning all the homunculi that hadn't moved an inch. "Is this an interesting project that you found?"

Now they were deep in enemy territory and on a Supreme-rank scholar's turf. This meant that the other side was prepared, and even if his original body was weak, there would likely be weapons and equipment that could absolutely crush them...

If it came down to a fight, odds of victory were slim.

Joseph had already sent a distress signal to Secret Rite Tower, and it would be pragmatic to buy as much time via engaging in conversation.

"It was," Raziel replied.

Andrew put forth a long-held conjecture that he had. "The 'Clay Idol' Project was something approved by all members of the Truth Union and something I personally signed off, yet there wasn't a single objection raised for such a bottomless pit of manpower and resources. It's pretty unbelievable when thinking about it now... It was you that influenced us, right?"

Raziel raised his hand at the circular beehive-like structure spanning far above him and said with a beaming smile, "That's

right. See those tiny rooms emitting green light?

“Inside every one of those rooms is a layer of gray matter of every scholar that acts as a medium for thought inducement.”

The entire structure was made up of countless small rooms, and the lights emanating for each were different.

There were approximately several hundred rooms that were green.

Andrew was stunned, then went numb as a tingling sensation came over him.

Gray matter of every scholar?

Did this mean that he had access to the brains of every Truth Union member?

How had he achieved that?

Cutting open one's skull and extracting a layer of brain cells all the while the subject was unawares... Just the thought of that caused Andrew's entire body to go numb as a kind of hysterical madness crept up within him.

While Joseph was no scholar, he, too, experienced the eerie dread that had swept across the entire place.

Doesn't this mean that the being before us is capable of manipulating the entire Truth Union... An enemy this frightening... Is this what a true Supreme-rank is capable of?

Raziel chuckled. “Have you forgotten? “Every scholar has to go through a medical examination and undergo one every subsequent year as long as they are members of the Truth Union, which was done in cooperation with the Church of the Dome.”

Church of the Dome!

The name of this now defunct religion popping up thoroughly shocked everyone present.

So that was the case...

Hood suddenly pointed at the cavity in Raziel's skull and asked, "Then... What about that? Did you run some sort of thought inducement experiment on yourself?"

Joseph instantly gripped the hilt of his sword as the veins on his forehead appeared on the verge of bursting. He had an impulse to reach out and clasp that brat's mouth. *This isn't the time to mention such a thing! Don't you know any common sense when we are in a confrontational standoff?!*

As expected, Raziel froze up, then his face scrunched up as he tilted his head strangely and gave a low, eerie laugh. "Not really..."

He placed a hand into that hole and swirled it rapidly, smirking as if he was enjoying it, then spoke in a manner that was between humming and croaking. "That bookstore owner that you all believe in is really impressive, heh. He came prepared and tried to reverse control my mind. However, it was completely seen through by me."

He withdrew his hand that was now covered in blood but devoid of any brain matter. "Ha-ha-ha-ha... Never expected it, huh. As long as I have no brain, how can you hope to control me?"

Chapter 316: One Of Our Own

Joseph was practically dumbfounded.

Despite his many years fighting battles on the front lines and experiencing fine margins of life and deaths as well as having gone through the vicissitudes of life, seeing a Supreme-rank being with a physical lack of a brain still caused his mind to go blank for a moment.

This... simply didn't make any sense!

When Raziel pulled his finger from his 'skull cavity' and laughed, the entire scene was an absurd, bizarre, and almost comical one.

But it didn't elicit any laughter, just complete silence.

There was a singular expression on the faces of all present: a mix of horror and befuddlement.

Because they had all come to realize a simple fact.

If Raziel's head was empty, by common logic, he was supposed to be dead.

Though Raziel was a Supreme-rank transcendent being, and the organ augmented most by aether for scholars was the brain (or in other words, the perk of scholars was the power of their brains), so there was no way the main body could have survived after such a vital organ was 'destroyed' to such an extent!

Who, then, was speaking and laughing with them at this very moment?

The ghost of Raziel? An apparition?

Evidently not.

Joseph had come across such undead lifeforms before, with their bodies made out of pure energy. Yet Raziel standing before them

was clearly in his own body and there wasn't any external spillover of power that he could detect.

He was literally talking to everyone without a brain, yet viewed it as if it was absolutely normal.

Could it just be his flesh, an empty shell with a consciousness of its own that is now thinking and speaking with us?

This absurd idea struck Joseph.

Or perhaps... Just as he said, Boss Lin has already done a reverse mind control on him. Moreover, it's not like Ymir, no, Raziel said he saw through and nullified it.

Perhaps contrary to that, Raziel's thoughts had already been manipulated by Boss Lin at that time. By the time he had the notion that 'having no brains means that he can't be controlled,' he had probably already lost his sense of self.

But he hadn't seen it and even reckoned that this was a logical option and blew his own brains out.

Now, this fellow standing before us is nothing but a puppet subjected to Boss Lin's will!

Joseph had a flash of realization and felt like he had grasped the truth.

However, deep down, he couldn't be one hundred percent certain.

The one in front was a true Supreme-rank, at a level where Joseph had yet to set foot in. And those thoughts that Joseph had were mere guesses... What if that seemingly absurd method could truly negate mind control?

However, if this speculation was correct, it would explain why Raziel hadn't come after them straight away and buried these bunch that had discovered the hidden secret in Machine Loop but was instead choosing to talk to them.

Joseph decided to test the waters first.

Maintaining his combat stance, he asked, "You mentioned that... the 'Clay Idol' Project was something that interested you as an academic, but now it no longer does?"

The morbid smile faded from Raziel's face. He shrugged, resuming his normal studious demeanor and sighed. "Of course not."

"But you've replicated at least a hundred T-1383s here," Hood interjected.

"That shows how much work and effort I once put in," Raziel said. "But I feel that this project no longer needs to go on and I don't want to put any more into it."

Andrew was taken aback. "No longer needs to go on...?"

The 'Clay Idol' Project was still ongoing, and although the stolen specimens were causing several huge setbacks to the project at the time, it could still be restarted.

"The truly perfect homunculus has already appeared and the rest of the experiment is optional. I just wanted to prove that the project was feasible, and now that the results are in, there's no need to continue the process," Raziel answered in a somewhat cryptic manner.

"Truly perfect homunculus?"

Andrew instantly thought of Mu'en, the bookstore assistant.

"That's right, every inch of the perfect homunculus' body possesses absolute aetheric affinity. The un-tempered physical strength of a Pandemonium-rank knight, and most importantly... she possesses intelligence! Intelligence not inferior to a human!"

Raziel continued on enthusiastically, "And she was created by me from the start! It was I who gave her everything; intelligence, the body, and that perfect grade philosopher's stone that supplemented her foundations!"

Andrew's eyes widened.

Wait, that... philosopher's stone? That philosopher's stone refined out from Jerome; the philosopher's stone that was eventually given to Boss Lin! It was all Raziel's move!

Given what Raziel had just said, everything that happened suddenly became clear.

As a member of the Path of the Flaming Sword, Raziel originally had ill intentions toward Boss Lin but was manipulated in reverse and killed the traitor Jerome who had been supposed to take refuge. He had refined the philosopher's stone that was given to Boss Lin for supplementing Mu'en.

Everything was entirely devised by Boss Lin!

"Oh?" Raziel noticed Andrew's expression and thus smiled. "You've probably understood as well, right?"

I do get it. You're one of us... You should've said so earlier... Andrew nodded subtly.

Joseph eyed Andrew suspiciously.

This old fellow... How has he understood? Understand what?!

With a satisfied look, Raziel said, "Since you understand, then you should probably know what I'm going to do next, don't you?"

His face had hints of strange expectation.

As the profound realization came over him, Andrew, who had figured it all out, suddenly knew why this Supreme-rank scholar lacking a brain had posed such a question.

He's actually lost the ability to think for himself. While he still retains his consciousness, he isn't able to think nor decide about something.... So he's waiting for instructions from 'one of our own.'

— Joseph mustn't be allowed to understand! This might be the only chance to completely control the Truth Union!

This notion flashed across Andrew's mind and he made a quick

decision. “You are going to send out all those people that pose a threat, to prevent anything going wrong.”

Raziel nodded haughtily. “Indeed.”

Before Joseph could react, he saw runes light up in a ring all around them.

In the next moment, the sights of a familiar walkway greeted him, along with various personnel that were moving about.

Joseph had barely gained his bearings when he heard someone call out in surprise, “Chief Joseph, what are you doing here?!”

Raziel had sent him directly back to Secret Rite Tower!

Chapter 317: Winter Had Arrived

What... just happened?

Joseph stood on the spot, somewhat in a daze. Faced with questions from knights in the area that had noticed him, he could only first utter some casual replies.

In truth, Joseph himself had no idea and couldn't give any answers even if he wanted to.

Joseph first let these men head back to their own business as he gradually calmed down.

Since he had been teleported back, those subordinates that had followed him to the Truth Union should have been sent back as well.

He took out his communications device to make sure, and as expected, he got responses all throughout Secret Rite Tower.

Though they were even more confused than Joseph, at least they were all safe and accounted for.

“Phew... At least it can be considered a blessing in disguise.”
Joseph heaved a sigh of relief.

If things had gone on, it would have likely ended up in a nasty battle with Raziell... This was a famed Supreme-rank scholar from history, and they had been on his turf. Had the battle taken place, approximately only one in ten of those subordinates would survive. Joseph himself didn't have too much confidence that he could win and reckoned the odds of victory were probably fifty-fifty.

Now, things had taken a strange turn, but avoiding injury and death could be considered a fortunate outcome.

But... Did Andrew really guess what Raziel's intent was, or did he have some other motive?

Joseph made arrangements for his subordinates and announced the change in their mission. They were to first inform the Truth Union and verify the situation.

Joseph then returned back to his own office and shut the door. With a frown, he continued to think through what had happened just now.

Everything had happened way too quickly...

Since the appearance of the legendary 'Ethereal Wisdom' Raziel, who had disappeared for ages, the whole incident had surpassed Joseph's range of comprehension and things had only gone on a downward spiral.

It had originally been a routine probing and delay, yet the outcome... Andrew seemingly understood Raziel's intentions and Raziel too recognized Andrew's 'understanding.'

Those two didn't seem like they were guessing, but rather, it was as if they were on the same wavelength.

And the outcome was to send those 'outsiders' away.

Joseph began to analyze the sequence of events which had just occurred.

"What is certain is that Andrew didn't know Raziel was the one inside Machine Loop's restricted area. He was surprised as well... He only knew that members of the Path of the Flaming Sword were in the restricted area but didn't know who it was.

"So, in that short space of time, he shouldn't have gotten Raziel's approval. In other words... He had no way of guaranteeing he would be safe and victorious against Raziel.

"Judging from their exchange, it didn't seem like a big problem... It's logical that Raziel really wanted to send away those that could pose a threat to him in order to do something to Andrew and the

others.

“But the question is, why did Andrew show an urgency to answer?”

“There’s no way he doesn’t know we were the only ones that could guarantee his safety under those circumstances. Given his answer, perhaps it hadn’t been his original intent, but he went ahead with it.

“But regardless, he’s still putting himself in danger.

“Unless his thoughts were already being controlled by Raziel?”

Joseph was perplexed. “No, if he’s already being controlled, why bother asking and answering his own question. He could have just sent us away and that would have been the end of the matter.

“Wait, ‘if that hadn’t been his original intent’...”

He uttered this phrase several times, then stood up abruptly and smashed his fist on the table, his pupils twitching. “He was certain that Raziel wouldn’t do anything bad to him, and his words were able to change Raziel’s opinion.

“And the crux for this whole affair was... Raziel actually having been reverse-controlled by Boss Lin!

“So it’s very likely that this fellow can be ‘verbally controlled’ by patrons of the bookstore!

“He’s not a danger. On the contrary, he is the best help that Boss Lin has left us!”

Joseph suddenly understood it all. But at the same time, he knew that this enlightenment had come a little too late...

“Goddamn! These scholars are disgusting! So what if you can use your brains?!” Joseph lost his temper and cursed.

It had taken him a few minutes of straightening out his thoughts here, yet Andrew had instantly understood the moment Raziel had posed the question and immediately gotten him to forcibly remove

all the ‘irrelevant people.’

These were the true colors of a scholar.

Knock knock.

A knock on his office interrupted Joseph.

Calming down from his outburst, Joseph gritted his teeth and muttered, “Enter.”

“It’s been a long time since... I’ve seen you this mad. What’s wrong?”

Entering the office and being surprised at the scene was an old acquaintance of Joseph’s, Chief of the Combat Division, Winston.

Joseph took a deep breath, shook his head, and continued stonily, “I think they probably don’t need our help anymore.”

Winston closed the door. With a nod, he chuckled. “The Truth Union has replied saying that everything is fine and it was merely an ordinary teleportation array. Vice-Chairman Andrew is very pleased with this mission and is very grateful for your help. Moreover, he has decided to grant a 50% reduction in equipment costs to our Logistics Department.

“...” The veins on Joseph’s forehead nearly burst open.

Winston immediately wiped the smile off his face. Frowning, he asked, “You don’t seem very pleased. A problem with the Truth Union?”

“A troublesome one!” Joseph hissed, placing emphasis on every single syllable.

He glared at Winston. “I will personally report to the Council of Elders regarding this mission.”

Winston was silent for a bit, eventually voicing, “What about the discount provided by the Truth Union? Do we still accept it?”

“Yes.”

“Ha.”

Joseph scoffed unperturbed. “We would be fools to not take what’s been given to us on their own free will.”

He once more returned back to his seat, nonchalantly organizing the documents on his desk. Suddenly, he froze up, a frown etched on his face.

As he estimated the time, he realized that Melissa ought to have reported to the Intelligence Division already. So, why weren’t her transfer documents and application form on his desk?

Winston was about to say something when his communications device beeped. An urgent voice broke out when the call was put through. “Chief, we have a situation!”

“What is it?” asked Winston at once.

“While using the monitoring system, we discovered that an instructor falsified information and sent the recently released Knight Melissa to take part in the Seventh Squad’s raid mission on the Corpse Devouring Sect’s hideout. Currently, she’s within the Dream Creator’s boundary on 67th Avenue. We have no way of transmitting information through it, but according to surveillance, there are at least five Pandemonium-ranks battling inside!

“And one of them is a direct subordinate of Wilde’s!”

Baam!

Before the report ended, Joseph had already burst out the door, blazing away like a streak of light.

Winston ran out after him immediately only to see a hole in the wall of Secret Rite Tower and a slight commotion breaking out.

Beyond the wall was a piercing white flash in the sky as snowflakes fell lightly.

A chilly breeze blew through the hole.

Winter had arrived.

Chapter 318: He's Left The Bookstore!

When the first snowflake fell from the sky, Lin Jie had already set up his bookstore.

The invitation mentioned that the large scale banquet would last for a whole three days with food and accommodation all covered by the host Ji Bonong.

Lin Jie had inquired Ji Zhixiu about relevant information about the banquet. Just the guests alone numbered more than a thousand. According to her description, guests included all sorts of notable members of society, and perhaps even powerful figures of Norzin's Central District would make an appearance.

No ordinary seating and accommodations could suffice, so it wasn't too difficult to imagine the extravagance of this banquet. But given that Ji Bonong was the top figure of Rolle Resource Development, such an elaborate approach to a party was totally normal.

Lin Jie felt that he had gotten this invitation based on his own ability (doling out chicken soup) and thus he couldn't let go of this chance to freeloader for three whole days.

No, since Miss Jiss had personally delivered the invitation, how could it be considered freeloading?

This was called a fair exchange of payment for non-manual labor.

In any case, this also meant that Lin Jie would be out for an entire three days. During this period, the bookstore still had to remain open and earn money.

Therefore, the daunting task of running the bookstore naturally fell on the shoulders of his able helper, Mu'en.

Having already briefed Mu'en on all the important and relevant

bits, Lin Jie was not repeating himself one final time before he got on his way.

Although it was a somewhat long-winded speech, Lin Jie was heading somewhere far away for the first time since he had transmigrated here three years ago, hence the importance in repeating his reminders...

He didn't have to travel too far when he usually went out to buy daily necessities; the furthest he had gone was the previous time Blackie helped transport him to Wilde's house.

Moreover, it would be three days not in the bookstore this time round, and it was a very strange experience for Lin Jie who had already been cooped up in his store for three years.

"The books on the shelf are classified accordingly. From left to right, philosophy, religion, military, economics, culture, sciences, arts, astronomy..."

The original bookshelf that had the ability to be refreshed with a single thought could only be used by Lin Jie.

Thus, for now, Lin Jie sorted them all into these categories temporarily, putting appropriate books so that it would be easy for Mu'en to find and sell.

Lin Jie usually refreshed the shelf after completely reading each batch. Fortunately, he hadn't refreshed the books for some time, so Mu'en who often cleaned the bookshelves would find them familiar and know what she was selling.

"If someone is looking to buy, charge the list price, no bargains.

"Don't accept any bargaining!" Lin Jie emphasized this point. Then pointing to another bookshelf at the side, he droned on, "If someone comes to borrow, take the books from here. 10 dollar deposit per book and a maximum of three loans per person. Make sure to get all of their details... You remember which details are required, right?"

Mu'en nodded. "Yes. Name, ID, address, means of contact."

“Very good.” Lin Jie nodded approvingly, then exhorted, “If you encounter any problems, make sure to call the police at the first sign of trouble. Although I know that you can fight well, you need to know that there are times when force isn’t the answer and you have got to use your brains to best ensure your safety.”

Mu’en nodded solemnly, then seemed to think for a moment before tilting her head and asking, “What if it can be resolved by force?”

Lin Jie: “...”

This young comrade’s thought process when it comes to resolving a problem is certainly wacky!

With a straight face, Lin Jie reached out and gave Mu’en a hard rub on her head. “You still have to call the police even if you can resolve it. Better to be safe than to be sorry. If anything happens to you, where am I going to find a second assistant?”

With gleaming eyes, Mu’en asked her boss, “Does that mean I’m a one-of-a-kind assistant?”

Lin Jie was at a loss at Mu’en’s ability to focus on the most random of points. Helpless, he sighed and gently patted the top of her head. “Yes, yes, yes. You are one-of-a-kind. Look at how broke I am, I definitely have no means to find another, ah.”

Mu’en earnestly nodded. “Indeed.”

“...”

Lin Jie sighed. *You really are the only one in the world able to meet a boss like me that is willing to accept you.*

“Well, looks like you are clear on all that you need to do. Oh, right. Remember to feed the cat.”

Lin Jie beckoned and Whitey immediately ran over and leaped into his arms.

After giving it a belly rub, he handed the plump cat over to Mu’en with a scoff. “This fella’s getting fatter by the day. I really regret

letting it go out to chase the pigeon back then... Maybe he got into a pigeon's house and had his fill."

Mu'en pinched the cat's ears, feigning ignorance.

She herself had clearly been the one that had run into the enemy's lair then... Was the boss hinting that she had gotten fat recently?

Ever since using the new philosopher's stone to supplement her foundations, Mu'en did find that she seemed to be eating more.

Lin Jie pushed open the bookstore's door and was surprised to find a thin layer of snow already covering the ground. On the road further away, the snow-covered road was littered with many footprints from random pedestrians.

Snowflakes fluttered in the sky and swirled in the wind, ushering the official arrival of winter.

Lin Jie reached out and caught a falling snowflake. Feeling the slight coldness in his palm made the Southerner in him lament, "Haa .. This is more like winter..."

Even though he had already been in Norzin for three years, the climate here was warmer. The coldest of the past three years had only brought about a few days of light snow, yet surprisingly, snow had come early this year.

"Perhaps there might be heavy snowfall this year," muttered Lin Jie before turning back to smile at Mu'en. "Now then, I'll be on my way. Look after Whitey and manage the bookstore well while I'm away."

Mu'en nodded with the fat cat in her hands and watched as the all-suited-up Boss Lin headed into the distance and vanished into an alley, leaving behind just a trail of footprints.

Thomas was a member of Secret Rite Tower's Logistics Division. As per usual, he sat by the window in a corner house on the street, leisurely brewing tea and keeping an eye on the mysterious bookstore.

Ever since the bookstore was flagged up to Secret Rite Tower, a special team was set up within the Logistics Division to observe it.

It was Thomas who was on shift duty today.

He had always thought this to be the most relaxing job because the bookstore owner's schedule couldn't be any more ordinary that Thomas thought the subject was excessively lazy.

The guy doesn't even leave the house!

"Haa... sometimes I can't help wondering whether this ordinary person is really a Supreme-rank."

Thomas took a sip of his tea and routinely cast a glance at the bookstore's entrance.

Then, his jaw dropped as he saw the dark-haired young man was actually dressed in a formal suit, bidding farewell to his young female assistant.

After which... he walked off in a direction he had never gone before!

"Pfft!"

Thomas spat on his tea and stood up hastily, knocking the table in the process before he scrambled out of the house.

As he ran, he pulled out his communications device and shouted in panic, "Alert! Attention all personnel! Attention!"

"He... He's left the bookstore! He's left the bookstore!"

Chapter 319: Eruption

A voice on the other end of the communications device clearly froze up for a moment before shouting in panic as well. “He’s left the bookstore! Attention all departments! He’s left the bookstore!

“Damn! Why did he suddenly decide to leave the bookstore?!

“Did some sort of problem pop up?!

“Dammit! What the heck is the Intelligence Division doing!”

The first half was informing others, while the latter part was more of a panicked rave.

However, everyone was well aware that the Intelligence Division was currently swamped due to the recent incident with Joseph and might not have too many resources to handle bookstore matters at present.

Another reason could be that things were much too stable for the bookstore owner. There hadn’t been any folks running to get themselves killed in recent times, and the bookstore owner hadn’t done anything that would cause an upheaval for the past period.

Everything had been peaceful.

There had only been three things of note during this time.

Ji Zhixiu had visited once more with gifts, but it was known that she was a regular, so it wasn’t anything out of the ordinary. She had made a few more visits but only left with books, so it seemed that it was just a routine purchase or loan.

The second and third matter occurred at the same time.

The owner of the second-hand bookstore opposite the street had handed Boss Lin that mysterious book which could also be considered something that wasn’t out of the ordinary.

At the same time, the bookstore owner's cat (its original form was still unclear, but according to the Sun's Faith, it was likely to be the Moon Child left behind by the Church of the Dome) and the assistant Mu'en had gone out at around the same time.

According to the duty personnel at that time, they had just gone to catch pigeons... It wasn't certain whether this was done for the bookstore owner's entertainment.

This uneventful routine, coupled with the growing conflict between Secret Rite Tower and the Corpse Devouring Sect, led to everyone's attention being placed on Joseph and Wilde.

...Even the Logistic Division's duty personnel here had gotten sloppy.

As a result, nobody had expected the bookstore owner would make such a huge move out of the blue—going out!

This, to the whole of Norzin, was as alarming as the entire Central District being fired on by the Aether Annihilation Cannon!

Thomas slammed the main door of the house open, scraping his fingers in the process as he stumbled out, almost in a tumble.

A strict voice on the other end of the communications device asked with urgency, "Thomas, report the current position of the bookstore owner at once as well as the direction he's headed in! You will lose your knighthood if you tell me you can't catch up!"

Thomas bellowed into the communications device as quickly as he could, "I'm currently in pursuit! From what I just observed, he has already turned into alley 16, probably headed for 24th Avenue! It's certain that this isn't the direction he usually heads in!"

As Logistic Division personnel stationed to keep an eye on the bookstore, nothing but only two things matters—a fast response and familiarity with the area! Thomas knew the layout of this street like the back of his hand, and from one look, he could determine where the bookstore owner was headed next. And that was where he was frantically running to.

Thomas quickly concluded there was only a supermarket and a grocery store nearby, but neither was on this route. The new commercial center by Rolle Resource Development was next to this alley, but it hadn't officially opened yet. And further ahead was a residential district where a temporary Secret Rite Tower post with three Abnormal-ranks and one Pandemonium-rank was stationed...

Did the bookstore owner go out in person just because of these small fries?

Impossible!

Thomas immediately denied this notion. *Further, think... If a straight line is drawn through this small alley, where does it pass by?*

His mind went into overdrive while his field of vision changed rapidly. Walls and roofs of various colors flashed by, yet his eyes never left the bookstore owner nor his shadow.

Thomas could have sworn he had never run so fast before in all his thirty-two years of life! Not even when he was less than a meter away from a dangerous dream beast on a certain battlefield!

There are too many places that 24th Avenue can lead to. There's no way of determining where he's going! We are totally helpless if we don't know his objective for leaving the store!

Thomas howled inwardly as he squatted on a rooftop watching Lin Jie's back intently.

The mysterious bookstore owner only went straight ahead, neither stopping nor attempting to make a turn.

Ahead was the end of the alley which was a dead end.

Secret Rite Tower, Logistics Division.

The normally calm and peaceful department was currently a chaotic mess.

“Report to the Council of Elders, inform the outer departments, especially the Intelligence Division. Contact the Truth Union! Hurry

hurry!

“Immediately enter the battle-ready state! Evaluators, appraisals, where are they?!”

“Who’s going to tell me what’s the current situation?!”

“What exactly happened during these few days?!”

Caroline, who had been promoted to Logistics Division Chief, slammed her hand on the table and berated her subordinates.

Someone immediately stood forth to give a report. “All parties have been informed. Orders from the top are to first observe and standby to evacuate. The Combat Division has already been mobilized. The Truth Union has activated Aether Surveillance, issued the highest warning, and prepared the Steel Boundary. The Intelligence Division...”

He paused for a moment before continuing on with a slight quiver in his voice, “There’s an incident with the Intelligence and there’s no information yet...”

Caroline frowned. “What incident? What could be more important than this? What about Joseph? Isn’t he the one in charge of reports on Boss Lin all the while?”

The reporting staff gulped and his face turned pale. “It’s Sir Joseph... Melissa was tricked into participating in the mission to siege the Corpse Devouring Sect’s hideout. Intelligence indicates that Wilde’s close aide, ‘Night Falcon,’ is currently engaging with Ma’am Vivian.

“That is why Sir Joseph rushed out from the Tower and headed for the battlefield!”

Caroline’s eyes widened as her mouth hung open but no words came out.

Joseph had marched straight into the battle with the Corpse Devouring Sect!

This was skipping the whole phase of testing the waters and directly going to war!

How could things happen at this juncture... Once Joseph left, Secret Rite Tower had lost one of its most powerful forces. And Boss Lin just had to head out of the bookstore at this time.

At this moment, another person rushed over hurriedly. "Latest information and report from the Intelligence Division!"

Caroline calmed herself down and made a gesture. "Report."

"A minute ago, Wilde appeared outside the 69th Avenue boundary. Accompanying him are two of his aides, 'Soaring Wyvern' and 'Bookworm,' and a large army of Corpse Devouring Sect members brought by the Sky Wolf.

"Two-thirds of our stations suffered simultaneous attacks by the Corpse Devouring Sect and are currently engaging in combat. At present, seven stations have fallen.

"Battle has thoroughly erupted!

"The Combat Division has dispatched reinforcements and the Sun's Faith has responded by sending out Apostles. However, the Truth Union denied our request for aid, saying that they will first need to ensure that the bookstore owner is safe."

The entire Logistics Division fell silent at that moment.

"What else?" Caroline asked vaguely.

The man continued, "According to the available information, the bookstore owner's movement might likely have something to do with the banquet being held by Rolle Resource Development."

Chapter 320: Stage

“Banquet?”

Caroline suddenly remembered that the current Rolle Resource Development Head, Ji Bonong, held a banquet at A16 Manor every year.

Then she felt it was both absurd and unbelievable.

Could Boss Lin be heading out for the banquet that Ji Bonong was hosting?

This... How is it possible?

Caroline was instinctively skeptical, for even though Rolle Resource Development was known as a gigantic monopoly by ordinary folk, in the eyes of the transcendent community, especially the Truth Union and Secret Rite Tower, that conglomerate was merely a convenient means of garnering money.

In terms of status, it was inferior to the Druid-controlled Ash Chamber of Commerce which at least had the opportunity to negotiate, engage, and cooperate with the aforementioned transcendent organizations.

For example, additional funding for Secret Rite Tower’s Intelligence Division was provided by the Ash Chamber of Commerce and Joseph still had to give them some face.

Rolle Resource Development, on the other hand, was purely a mining tool. Even if they made a lot of money, that money was from the transcendent folk. Wouldn’t it be ridiculous using this wealth as a means to negotiate?

Bluntly put, Ji Bonong was a figurehead, and the ones manipulating behind the scenes were actually the authorities of the Central District; transcendent beings in the upper echelons of the Truth Union as well as Secret Rite Tower’s Council of Elders.

Ji Bonong was just an ordinary mortal, and that was his greatest sin.

Just this fact doomed him and Rolle Resource Development to never have a place on the stage of transcendent beings.

And it was those at the top who had so evidently arranged this meticulously. The things that Rolle Resource Development controlled were too important. If these were allowed to be in the hands of transcendent beings, it would inevitably lead to seeds of ambition giving rise to rebellion.

But when it was an ordinary person with no talent, it didn't matter whatever ideas he had, for it would never translate to action.

However, this time around, those bigwigs seemed to have miscalculated.

Just as a massive war that had been brewing for a long time erupted, Rolle Resource Development seemed to stealthily attempt a home run and had inconceivably succeeded...

Having assumed thus far, Caroline couldn't help but be shocked, her originally firm opinions wavering.

From a normal perspective of analysis, it's impossible for Ji Bonong to move Boss Lin, but the premise is... from a normal perspective.

But does Boss Lin belong to a normal range? Evidently not.

Moreover, he's the greatest variable in the equation.

He isn't evil but is in pursuit of his own pleasure. And now, if he wants to see a show—a show where the ordinary overthrow the transcendent—then, without a doubt, Ji Bonong seems to be the best choice!

Caroline's eyes widened as if she had instantly understood what was on Boss Lin's mind.

Given all that was happening at this time, this absurd possibility had instantly multiplied!

Her body trembled slightly as she eyed the reporting subordinate and urged, “Go on! What about other information and data from the Intelligence Division that supports this theory?”

Nodding his head, the subordinate continued, “Firstly, Ji Bonong’s daughter Ji Zhixiu visited the bookstore with a leather suitcase some time back. At that time, the Intelligence Division’s observed that aetheric fluctuations were in a normal range but later captured slightly abnormal modulations. However, nothing was out of the ordinary, so they took no notice and only made a record.”

“Was there a problem with the suitcase?” asked Caroline.

“There’s a high likelihood of that. Our speculation was that Ji Zhixiu likely made a request to the bookstore owner.

“Secondly, at that time, Ji Zhixiu didn’t walk to the bookstore as per the name but went by car. During that visit, the driver followed her into the bookstore as well. We have just checked the registry database, but didn’t find the existence of such a driver under the Ji Family or Rolle Resource Development’s employment.

“So, there’s a possibility that the driver at that time was Ji Bonong himself.”

Upon hearing this and taking the written report over to read it herself, Caroline felt as if her brain had been struck by a bolt of lightning.

So this is it! It’s actually like this!

This way, everything makes sense.

Caroline thoroughly figured it all out.

Ji Zhixiu’s visit to Boss Lin came first, and Wilde’s intent to restore the stone gargoyles he had given Boss Lin resulting in a confrontation with Joseph once more came later.

Was this evidence that Boss Lin had acceded to the request and accelerated the conflict?

And in the days before and after that, Vice-Chairman Andrew of the Truth Union had also visited the bookstore a few times.

Was this the reason why the Truth Union wasn't willing to provide aid to Secret Rite Tower at this crucial juncture?

If this was all true, the current outbreak of fighting was probably all within Boss Lin's plans.

Then, all of this had been made to divert the attention of the Truth Union, Secret Rite Tower, and other transcendent beings to the approaching showdown between Wilde and Joseph to distract them from another matter happening on the side...

The banquet at Manor A16, vacating a stage belonging to mortals... to the fullest extent for his own enjoyment.

"Uh... Where's the Logistics Division personnel responsible for keeping track of the bookstore's activities? Has there not been any reply?" Caroline rubbed her temples, then suddenly sighed. What could she even do now?

Someone reported to her at once, "He just replied, but..."

Caroline tensed up, feeling as if her heart was up in her throat. "What's wrong?"

The reporting subordinate hesitated, then said, "Thomas, the duty personnel today, might have an issue with his mind. He first said that the bookstore owner disappeared, then started to spout nonsense, laughing, saying that the wall was a door, shadows an abyss, then something about the ancient and the cosmos..."

Caroline sighed and made a gesture with her hand. "It's normal. Just bring him back and subject him to the mental correction that is usually done for hunters."

She then got her subordinates to check with the station in the vicinity of Manor A16. Indeed, there was a report that Boss Lin had been spotted which confirmed her own guess.

If this was really set up by Boss Lin, who were they to try and stop

him?

Even if they were to stop it, how would they face Boss Lin? Who could stand against his power?

Since it couldn't be stopped, they could only just lay back and pray that the peculiar bookstore owner just wanted to watch a show in peace...

In any case, they simply didn't have the resources to place their attention there... The Corpse Devouring Sect was on the move, and a battle between two Destructive-ranks was about to engulf Norzin.

And under these circumstances, the chief culprit had the luxury of attending a party of ordinary folk.

It had to be said, this was very like Boss Lin.

At this very moment, the Truth Union.

Andrew turned away the scholar that had come to inform him about Secret Rite Tower's appeal for aid. With a chuckle, he thought to himself, *You are getting way ahead of yourself if you wish to disrupt the Lord's banquet. Joseph, you have to pay the price for impurity.*

Chapter 321: Cooperation

To Andrew, Joseph's impurity was because the latter was just a 'beneficiary of the bookstore.'

Joseph did show his gratitude and reverence towards Boss Lin, but fundamentally, he was completely different from them. He was neither a follower of the bookstore, nor did he follow a religion that had originated from the bookstore.

It didn't matter if it were the Wisdom-Seekers, the Corpse Devouring Sect, or even the Sun's Faith. Truth was, all of them came from the same source.

Every faction had been established under the influence of the bookstore; all of them listened and followed Boss Lin's will and words. As such, it could be said that they all had different interpretations of the same source material and were basically of the same existence but projected differently. The only ones dissimilar to them were Joseph and Secret Rite Tower.

Andrew could see it very clearly—within Secret Rite Tower's Council of Elders were feelings of fear, alarm, and more so, thoughts of manipulation, greed, and ambition! No different from those ordinary mortals, their foolishness knew no bounds. They lacked any semblance nor qualifications to be devotees!

As for Joseph, the old knight was already on the precipice to come crashing down.

However, he had realized the Corpse Devouring Sect wasn't created by Wilde alone but emerged from the will of Boss Lin. Every single misdeed carried out by Wilde was met with Boss Lin's silent toleration. Which meant it didn't matter how much Joseph struggled, he would ultimately end up being turned on his head!

In other words, as of today, in spite of the grace Boss Lin had granted him by dragging him out of the demon sword's abyss, Joseph's innate sense of justice still overpowered subservience to

the bookstore.

Andrew was undoubtedly sure that Joseph would end up being an enemy of the bookstore.

For this was the true Joseph, the Indomitable Sacred Flame that detested all evil!

To a certain degree, it had also been Boss Lin who had changed Andrew's own view, and Boss Lin, who was observing it all, would definitely be pleased to witness this scene.

This was all that went through Andrew's mind as he pondered in silence. Beckoning for his subordinates to fall back, he turned toward Raziél on his right. "We can now resume the conversation we were having just now. Since it's your ideology to make the Truth Union great again, I believe that our goals undoubtedly align with each other. I sincerely hope you do what you did a thousand years ago—become the leader of scholars—and reveal yourself to the world again."

Andrew's gaze was determined, and his tone was composed.

It appeared as if they were engaging in a conversation after an unanimous agreement, but in truth, Andrew was continuously 'guessing' the thoughts of Ymir.

And every time he raised a 'guess' or 'conjecture,' Raziél would agree that he himself had such thoughts in his mind.

By the process of repeated suggestion of outlandish guesses as a means to probe, Andrew was able to ascertain the previously inspired notion that he had.

Now, after 30 minutes of positive interaction, the two had already become agreeable comrades who completely understood one another. Raziél pushed up the bridge of his glasses and nodded his head in agreement.

"It's indeed the case, the Truth Union was founded by me. But its former glory is nowhere to be seen today."

He stood up and sauntered to the transparent floor-to-ceiling windows of the office and watched cold and aloof scholars hurrying to and fro along the opposite corridor, then gave a long sigh.

“I’ve been constantly observing the development of the Truth Union while I was in Machine Loop. Nowadays, scholars seem to only learn how to be arrogant and inflexible. Besides that, there isn’t an ounce of improvement or innovation, and nobody is able to walk a different path from the one I had paved before.”

He then proceeded to point at where the Aether Annihilation Cannon was. “Even the fundamental structure of this weapon was designed by me, yet no one ever thought of modifying it.”

Andrew stood up as well and looked toward Raziel. “So that’s why you were livid.”

Raziel was rather moved by those words and replied sullenly, “The Truth Union produced no other Supreme-ranks besides me. I’ve always believed that if I were to erase my entire existence and become a shadow of the path, the Truth Union would find ways to improve themselves. “Who would’ve expected that because of the smooth starting point, its future would only go downhill.

“After all these years, I have personally witnessed the Truth Union slowly decline into a so-called ‘sect of reason’ by strictly following rules and customs.

“When new ideas were to pop up, the first thoughts would be to eliminate the outliers. As long as there is a possibility of the idea overpowering theirs, it would be removed.

“To be frank, all of you disappoint me to no end.

“Doesn’t Wilde, who is feuding with Secret Rite Tower, have the so-called ‘Bookworm’ with him? “Wasn’t he kicked out of the Truth Union because he experimented in human transmutation? But to me, he possesses great talent in alchemy, and achieving Destructive-rank wouldn’t be hard for him.

“And he is a true diamond in the rough.”

He turned to Andrew with a mocking grin on his face. “Heheh, even this ‘Clay Idol’ Project was pioneered by me. I believed that as the Vice-Chairman, you should be most aware of this fact.

“If I didn’t tamper with your minds, there definitely wouldn’t be any possibility of this project being executed. This was also a reminder of sorts; if you all aren’t even willing to bear the costs of trial and error, how could any of you possibly make a difference?”

Raziel was evidently heavily influenced by Andrew’s words to spill his heart out. In one breath, he vented all his thoughts that had smothered him during his extended stay in the Machine Loop.

Andrew, however, was noncommittal to Raziel’s point of view.

For the Truth Union to continue developing, their unrelenting and incessant methods to get whatever they wanted wasn’t up for discussion.

Perhaps things would get worse, but if extra care was paid to Raziel’s re-emergence, perhaps the Truth Union’s cohesion and strength could be maximized?

Now, thanks to the ‘pearl milk tea’ provided by the book cafe, more than half of the upper management were ‘Wisdom-Seekers.’ However, the loyalty of scholars in the lower rungs was still insufficient.

Though the most important factor was the staunch group of Maria’s supporters who were still unwavering.

But if these textbook-level scholars were to witness the resurrection of Raziel, the entire fiasco would probably scare those supporters to the core.

Andrew gave a silent laugh.

He cleared his throat, put on a guilt-ridden face, and said, “Indeed, we have all been derelicts, but I’m actually also dissatisfied with the current state of affairs and have been thinking of a reformation.”

“But?” asked Raziel.

“But I’m only the Vice-Chairman. Only the Chairman has the right to veto. Regardless of how beneficial the case is, it cannot come into fruition so long as she refuses. Moreover, there are plenty of scholars who only pretend to obey orders.”

Raziel scoffed. “No one can be the chairman for an eternity. Even if she could do so, I can make sure it doesn’t happen.”

A grin appeared on Andrew’s face.

This was the line he had been waiting for!

“Hey, are you also here for the banquet?”

Lin Jie looked up at the looming and extravagant construct and lamented at how the rich could spare such expenses. Upon hearing the question, he turned and was met with a freckled young man with blue eyes and blond hair beckoning to him.

He seemed of a similar age to Lin Jie with an expressive face and donning a crisp new black tuxedo along with a striped waistcoat. His pants weren’t very fitting, appearing rather wide and loose on him. His black leather shoes were well-polished, but it was obvious they didn’t do much to keep out the cold; he was slightly shivering in the cold wind. Calluses could be observed on the hand he used to wave at Lin Jie.

“Indeed.” Lin Jie took out his invite and flashed it.

Chapter 322: Questioning

The young man was slightly stumped and had some doubts when he saw the invitation in Lin Jie's hand.

That was because this invitation was different from the one he had... In a sense, it was vastly different from his own.

The base of Lin Jie's invitation was also black, but it was obvious the thick paper used was special. The Rolle Resource Development insignia embossed in silver at the bottom corner exuded low-key luxury...

The young man couldn't help but gaze at the invitation he held. Though it was also relatively special with a black base and gold lettering, it was otherwise a very ordinary invitation.

This difference is just too great...

While he was sure he held the real invitation—this invitation style had already been spread throughout the city and given Rolle Resource Development's status—no one would dare forge one.

Neither had he heard of Ji Bonong handing out special invites...

If not for that, he really would have suspected he himself was holding a fake invite.

Could it be... that this guy's invitation is fake? However, seeing Lin Jie's unassuming and carefree manner made him shake his head and reject that notion.

This is the manor gate after all, and I doubt anyone is foolish enough to come knocking with a fake invite.

Furthermore, if it's truly a special invitation, a nobody like me probably would not have heard about the likes of it.

While thinking about all this, he put back on a stiff smile and casually introduced himself. "I'm Houston Fitch, just a mere

violinist that isn't worth mentioning. You can call me Fitch."

While he described himself this way, his face was filled with extreme pride.

It required a certain repute and prestige for one to be invited to a banquet hosted by Ji Bonong. Being invited meant one was recognized by the upper class and was naturally worthy of pride.

Since he dared to introduce himself as a violinist, he was naturally rather accomplished in the field.

In fact, 'Wandering Genius' Houston Fitch had been all the rage in Norzin's music scene of late.

He didn't belong to any orchestra or official organization but was instead a wandering drifter that played improvisational music in the squares and street corners of Norzin, often drawing crowds of hundreds because of his skill.

But what had really put him on the map was a 'musical showdown' a month ago.

In front of the entrance of the famed Golden Orchestra Hall, he had beat out the principal first violinist via a vote by the audience, leading to Fitch's name to spread throughout the music world.

And the following month, he had received an invitation from Ji Bonong.

As a self-styled frugal drifter that refused all assistance from others, Fitch had to scrape together some money to rent the cheapest top and shoes just to attend this party...

Just the top and shoes, but no bottoms.

The pants he wore currently had been sponsored by the owner of the rental shop out of goodwill — The owner had heard of Fitch, and while he didn't really believe the young musician was capable of scoring a Rolle Resource Development invite, providing a pair of pants wasn't much of a problem.

Of course, given his body size, it naturally wouldn't be that well-fitting.

Feeling cocksure in his cheap suit, Fitch furtively took measure of the other, hoping this similar-aged new acquaintance would give him a pleasant surprise.

"Lin Jie." Lin Jie casually handed over his business card, then mulled for a second before adding, "Just the owner of an ordinary bookstore."

Fitch: "..."

That... That's it?

Utterly dumbstruck, Fitch stared at him, trying to read something else from his expression.

That showdown was broadcast live on Norzin news! The only news in recent times that surpass this is the joint crackdown on the Church of the Dome by the Sun's Faith and the Central District Police Unit where the pope and apostles of the church were killed on the spot due to putting up a resistance!

The name Fitch should already be known by most in Norzin!

For the past few days, Fitch had even specially gone to different places as a test, and people who hadn't seen him perform could also recognize him...

Lin Jie noticed the violinist staring at him so intently and thus asked, "Is there a problem?"

It would be unseemly for Fitch to ask, "*Haven't you heard about me before?*", thus he could only shrug and said sullenly, "No..."

He arrived filled with excitement and had even practiced many times on how to reveal his identity humbly, how to deal with surprise and praise, how to deal with doubt and jealousy... Yet, he never expected to face a shut door upon meeting his first subject of conversation.

But, a bookstore owner?

Does a person like that also get invited to a banquet hosted by Ji Bonong? Could he actually be a fraud?

Fresh doubts had once more resurfaced in Fitch's mind, and thus he asked with a tinge of skepticism, "No, but just one question. Could you tell me the name of your bookstore?"

Those who could score an invite to such a banquet were definitely accomplished persons in certain fields. Even a bookstore owner would surely need a certain degree of repute or financial resources.

There are only a few famous bookstore chains in Norzin, right?

As for personally owned ones, Tulip Secondhand Bookstore is the most reputable, but the boss is Theodore... I've never heard anyone say that a new bookstore had popped out.

Not right. Something isn't right!

Fitch suddenly got excited. He sensed that he had stumbled on yet another opportunity to make a name for himself.

On his first time attending an A16 Manor banquet, the talented and intelligent violinist Houston Fitch sees through an attempted sneaking in by a fraud thanks to his keen intuition and accurate judgment...

Mhmm... That's really not a bad way to make an entrance.

Trying to suppress his grin, Fitch raised his chin and scrutinized Lin Jie openly with the intent to create psychological pressure on the latter.

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow and stroked his chin. "That's a really good question..."

How do I put 'because I was too lazy to name my bookstore for three years' in a nice way?

Fitch scoffed. "Don't tell me you don't even have a name for your bookstore?"

Sure enough I have caught a conman.

“A fragrant wine fears no dark alley. As long as my books are good enough, it doesn’t matter if I have no name or signboard,” replied Lin Jie pretentiously.

Fitch sneered. *Continue fibbing, no matter what you say, I’ll be waiting to expose you at the entrance.*

Chapter 323: A Fierce Scheme

Everyone knew how classy an A16 Manor banquet held by Ji Bonong could be. Those that could gain an invite were definitely not nobodies.

These banquets were regarded as the gateway to enter Norzin's top circles and a path to a higher status. Rumor had it that many had risen through the ranks after attending such banquets. Thus, it was only naturally for anyone capable of being invited to feel proud.

In other words, the most important aspect of this banquet was the networking between guests. So why would this person be so vague about his own identity?

This was the reason Fitch was convinced the man standing before him was a fraud.

Of course, that was only one of the major reasons. Beyond that, there were still many others.

It was unlikely that this guy might be a big shot that was trying to keep his identity a secret. As if just saying some vague words and having an invitation made one a big shot.

And the most concrete proof, according to Fitch, was the suit his counterpart wore.

The self-proclaimed ordinary bookstore owner in front of him was wearing a formal suit that had already become outdated last year. The cost of this suit was five hundred dollars, and that had been the price from two years ago. Assuming that this was newly bought, it probably had a price reduction of at least 30%.

And why would a drifter like Fitch know all of this so well?

It was because he had performed in the aisles of malls for years when he drifted about in the past. Every time the few spectators dispersed and he put away the violin case which had garnered coins

and some small bills, Fitch would always stop at the windows of clothing stores and look on enviously.

He would judge the strengths and weaknesses of those clothes, imagine how he would look if he put them on, and how gazes of others would change if they saw him in these clothes...

But eventually, upon seeing the price tag and the thought of the money he had in his pockets, Fitch would end up leaving dejectedly.

Fitch wandered through the years, day after day, gradually getting a sense of the price changes, the fashion trends, and even the sales methods.

In short, he couldn't be wrong when it came to this.

Thus, the question was, could it be possible for a big shot to wear such cheap clothes to this classy banquet in a bid to deliberately hide his identity yet expose himself by revealing such a conspicuous invitation?

Clearly, it didn't make sense!

Therefore, it pointed to only one thing.

He wasn't just a fraud but an audacious one who dared to try and deceive the president of Rolle Resource Development!

How would he try to do so?

Simple. Just like how Fitch had initially reacted, one would be taken aback by the 'high-end' invitation produced by him. Then, given the counterpart's natural response, Fitch had immediately assumed that this was someone important. Thus, because of his psychological inertia, Fitch started to assume that everything this person said or did had a much deeper meaning.

Fitch had crossed paths with all sorts of liars during his wanderings, and similar tactics were not unheard of.

He boldly assumed that this conman's thought process was to first

find a guest who didn't look like a 'high-class' person. Then, using the aforementioned method, he would get this guest to believe that he too was a fellow guest coming for the banquet.

Thus, this person would become a tool in the subsequent fraud by proving his identity in reverse. This way, he would be able to deceive the doorman and finally sneak into the banquet.

And because Ji Bonong was well-known to welcome talents from all sorts of fields, this fellow might not actually be chased away and become a guest that is a 'top talent in the field of fraud.'

It had to be said that this is well thought out.

Unfortunately... This guy has met a wiser version of himself.

Fitch felt as if he'd completely seen through the man's intentions. He could already imagine the look on the man's face when he didn't cooperate afterward and instead exposed his lies. Fitch couldn't help but smile and nearly let out a laugh.

"Huh?"

Lin Jie eyed the guest who was walking beside him. This young violinist seemed to be a peculiar fellow that became immersed in his own world way too easily.

Lin Jie had come across such students when he was a lecturer.

Lowered heads during classes as if oblivious to the world, a wooden look with blank eyes from time to time, not many friends but often smiling slightly for no reason indicating the rich emotions in their hearts...

But all these were a sign of mental disabilities. In Lin Jie's opinion, such students were usually simpler and more honest, and led simpler and happier lives.

Fitch is probably just like that too, huh? Perhaps with a tough life on top of that...

Lin Jie nodded to himself as he eyed Fitch's ill-fitting clothes. *He's*

surely got quite some musical talent to be invited to such a banquet.

He wasn't a cheater after all who relied on her relationship with Miss Ji to be here.

Thus, the two of them walked to the manor's entrance in this somewhat strangely harmonious atmosphere.

Currently, more guests were starting to show up at the wide road leading up to the manor. Chauffeurs in neat suits held the car doors open as they emerged, dressed swankily, with alluring female companions on their arm, or were dazzling beauties themselves.

Every one of them strode confidently to the doorman and handed over their invitations.

Mhmm... Lin Jie reckoned that even those drivers were more fitting as guests than himself.

But what did it matter?

Lin Jie was in a relaxed mood. In any case, he was here to be a freeloader. As long as he just kept eating and drinking at the periphery of the party, he basically wouldn't be bothered by others.

Though from his past experiences attending some flash academic conferences, he would still have people looking for him even if he stayed on the fringes.

However, that had been the halo effect of being an associate professor as well as his identity as Lin Minghai's son. But now, he was at most just a good friend of Young Miss Ji, so it shouldn't be so bad.

"Your invitation, please." The doorman held his hand out politely.

Fitch was slightly closer. He raised his invitation up, displaying it for a second before placing it in the doorman's hand with great care.

The doorman was well trained and maintained a polite smile throughout. He checked the invitation, then and said warmly.

“Welcome to A16 Manor, Mr. Houston Fitch. Good luck.”

At once, some people that were nearby turned to survey Fitch curiously and started to talk among themselves quietly.

Fitch probably enjoyed being the center of attention. He cleared his throat, straightened his lapels with his head held high, and took back his invitation. Then, he stepped aside and looked toward Lin Jie awaiting the good show that was about to begin.

Naturally, Lin Jie took out his own invitation.

Although it was not quite the same as other people’s invitations, this had been given to him personally by Miss Ji so it could not be fake.

There was a subtle change in the doorman’s expression when he saw the invitation, but he quickly returned back to the status quo. He took the invitation, checked it carefully, and even took out a special illumination device from his pocket.

Those in the area that had been turned to look at Fitch upon hearing his name were now gradually drawn to this scene. They were intrigued and the muted discussion started to ramp up.

Apparently, they’d never seen anyone stay at the entrance so long because of an invitation as well.

Fitch stood nonchalantly with his hands behind his back, waiting for the scene he’d imagined to appear.

Next, this guy is definitely going to be questioned. Then he would drag me to attest his identity. When that happens... he-he-he.

Fitch’s lips curled into a strange smile again, and he watched the doorman’s every move with great concentration, afraid to miss the perfect moment.

However, after the doorman checked it several times over, he withdrew the instrument and revealed a smile that was no different from before. With a slight bow, the doorman greeted, “Welcome to A16 Manor, Mr. Lin Jie, I hope you have a pleasant three days

here.”

Fitch’s smile froze. He looked like he’d seen a ghost.

H-How? Could this invitation be... N-No, it cannot be real. How can the wise Houston Fitch be wrong!

The same sort of confusion appeared on the faces of those around, and the focus of the discussion gradually shifted. More and more people noticed this and asked others what had happened.

Fitch suddenly felt his face burning as if the crowd was laughing at him. The shame he felt for being a smart-ass gradually turned to anger.

No, it can’t be... I’m surely right!

The look in Fitch’s eyes suddenly changed. His blue eyes became cloudy as he fixed a stare at the doorman, who still handed back the invitation.

Identify... yourself as a fake right now!

Fitch cried out in his heart — even though he appeared to be nothing more than a wandering fiddler, he previously learned a lot about the existence of certain groups through some shady channels and had taken enormous risks to acquire the power to manipulate minds.

This was an important reason why Houston Fitch, the Wandering Genius, had made his name.

He had relied on mind manipulation to win at the entrance of the Golden Orchestra Hall.

The real reason he had come to the banquet was because he heard that there would be quite a number of transcendent beings attending the party. Therefore, he wanted to seek a breakthrough and enter the world of transcendents.

Only that would be a true class change.

But having activated his ability, Fitch didn't get a response as quickly as he usually did.

The doorman handed the invitation back without so much as a pause. Lin Jie smiled, took it, and made his way to Fitch.

Everything went smoothly and nothing happened.

There would be transcendent beings at the banquet —No way... Fitch's mind went blank as he stared dumbstruck at the approaching Lin Jie.

Gulp!

Suddenly Fitch felt an inexplicable sensation of wanting to run away.

Lin Jie shot him a quizzical look. "Come on. It's time to attend the banquet. Why are you still standing there in a daze?"

Turning back to glance at the doorman and with his back to the brightly lit manor, Lin Jie's shadowed profile was half smiling. "He won't give you a second look no matter how hard you stare at him."

Chapter 324: Your Method Is Wrong

Fitch stood rooted to the spot, feeling the chill of the night air. That chill was as if a bucket of cold water had drenched him from head to toe, seeping into his bones and dousing whatever excitement he had.

These words echoed in his ears for a long time and he could clearly hear the faint sarcasm and helplessness in Lin Jie's sigh.

At any other time, such a sigh would be warranted because they had seen the glamour and glitz of those other guests and mocking the doorman who only had eyes for guests dressed in luxury. Given that Lin Jie and Fitch were both a bunch of poor guys, it was understandable that they would feel a little self-defeated upon seeing how poor and insignificant they were in comparison.

But that wasn't the case now.

The clearly different invitation that Lin Jie produced had actually been verified to be genuine by the doorman, who even seemed to treat him with even greater respect while inviting him into the estate. Perhaps others couldn't see it clearly, but Fitch, who was right next to him, could intuitively sense the doorman bowing slightly more.

This in itself was the greatest honor, even more so than other guests that wore the most luxurious and expensive clothes. There was simply no reason for him to be ridiculing the inconstancy on show here.

What's more, Fitch had tried using his ability only to realize it wasn't effective, and the person he had been targeting, who should have made a fool of himself, had given Fitch a smile and told him to stop staring.

Wasn't that the same as telling him to stop wasting time, for his

powers wouldn't work?

Thus, there could only be one possibility.

The meaning of the words and the irony contained in that smile were mocking Fitch's ignorance and overconfidence.

Gulp.

Fitch heard himself swallow nervously. For a moment, his heart felt like it was going to leap out of his chest as he saw the young man approaching him.

H-he wouldn't really be that displeased, would he? Lin Jie could only sigh. He felt a sense of camaraderie with this fellow with him. They were both in the same boat, both poor fellows... Attending such a high-end banquet really required courage.

Who, not for circumstances, wouldn't wish to be a freeloader?

And although the doorman was professional and well-mannered, Lin Jie had still caught the momentary change in his expression.

When Fitch had handed over his invitation, the doorman had pursed his lips slightly and given a look as he saw the former's ill-fitting attire.

This vaguely signified that the seemingly impartial doorman also had some disdain and arrogance toward the poor.

And with Lin Jie, it had been even more obvious. Before Lin Jie handed over his invitation, the doorman had treated him only slightly better than a nondescript like Fitch, completely unlike those more dignifiedly dressed guests.

But once Lin Jie handed over the invitation, the doorman had even lowered his head to bow.

These changes before and after were truly an apt description of being a 'snob.'

That had been why Lin Jie sighed.

How could these eyes that only looked toward the rich turn back to meet the yearning gazes of the poor?

That's right. In Lin Jie's eyes, Fitch's gaze of 'reluctance' at the doorman was the look of a poor fellow with a heart full of yearning.

However, Lin Jie felt that saying it outright would probably be inappropriate and embarrass the young violinist. Thus, he corrected himself tactfully and shrugged. "I mean, he won't look at you, nor would he possibly look at me. After all, he doesn't view us as the same level as him, even if he's just a doorkeeper himself. Or putting it in another way, what you are hoping for deep down probably isn't going to happen. You... Do you understand?"

Lin Jie deliberately lowered his voice a little so that the doorman or others wouldn't overhear them.

As for what Fitch was on Fitch's mind... Given the way he was acting, he had probably been quite confident about his reputation only to experience a nonchalant greeting by the doorman before he even got the chance to bask in the limelight...

It was just too bad the doorman only had eyes for the rich.

Then, as Lin Jie attempted to pat Fitch's shoulder in a bid to comfort him, the young violinist raised an arm and hopped back, like a monkey whose tail had been stepped on, backing away and shaking his head anxiously as if on the verge of crying. "I know, I understand, I'll never think like that again! Never again!"

If Fitch had already had his own guess before, this was clearly telling him — *I've cut off the doorman's perception of us. We are 'on different levels', so your ability won't work. Stop dreaming.*

Unfortunately, he had really met a transcendent being even stronger than himself!

Furthermore, Fitch had even tried to embarrass him in public...

Fitch trembled at that thought.

"???" Lin Jie appeared baffled and rubbed his chin. Something

didn't seem right. He glanced at Fitch, who seemed to be overreacting, and asked after a moment's pause, "Do you really understand?"

Fitch stiffened, beads of cold sweat forming on his forehead. "I understand. I really do. I really shouldn't have had those thoughts..."

Hearing this, Lin Jie could only sigh. "Indeed, you still haven't understood what I meant."

Fitch shuddered. He swore he'd never seen anyone as temperamental before. "T-Then what do you mean?"

Lin Jie explained sincerely. "I mean, what you had in mind wasn't bad, but not everyone would fall for it, especially these doormen, who guard the homes. They've received more upper-class people than you've seen in your entire life, so it's impossible to make them think more highly of you."

He paused, then waved a finger in mock seriousness. "Besides," he said, "your method was wrong."

Fitch was a little dizzy from all that beating around the bush. "Then what should I have done?"

Lin Jie blinked and flashed his usual kindly professional smile. The hand that had been behind his back all this time appeared with a book in hand. "I have a book here..."

Sun's Faith.

The church that had once belonged to the Church of the Dome had been refurbished by the new religion. However, besides changing the symbols of the Church of the Dome into the Sun, not much other structural changes had been done.

In the words of the first Pope, Vincent, the new religion was still in its infancy and there were many other things that needed to be done. Instead of wasting financial and material resources on such a place, it was more important to focus on the congregation and the followers themselves.

Naturally, such an approach drew praise.

At the moment, Vincent was sitting in his papal seat in his intricate golden robes. His eyes were no longer covered with strips of cloth, but instead closed as he 'looked down' at the congregation beneath him.

One of the apostles was currently giving a report. "Secret Rite Tower and the Corpse Devouring Sect are officially warring. The people we dispatched have joined the battle to assist Secret Rite Tower. At the moment, the bulk of the fighting is concentrated between Avenues 67 to 71 and most residents have already been evacuated because of the fire."

Vincent tapped the armrest of his seat and asked, "What about the Truth Union?"

"The Truth Union has currently refused to provide assistance on the grounds of verifying Boss Lin's safety first."

Vincent paused to think for a moment. Then, his 'eyes' opened revealing what appeared like blazing magma. "What the Sun wants is 'Justice'. The evil Corpse Devouring Sect must be burned to the ground. That is justice—

"Therefore, the Truth Union supports the Corpse Devouring Sect in secret by obstructing justice and needs to be purged."

Chapter 325: Free Things Are The Most Expensive

Fitch could feel his mind going blank. He was speechless with a face filled with bafflement. "...Book?"

With his usual kindly smile, Lin Jie started to tuck the book ***Thick Black Theory*** into Fitch's arms. "As I said before, 'a fragrant wine fears no dark alley.' As long as the books I sell are good enough, it doesn't really matter if the book has a title or if the shop has a signboard."

In his stupor, Fitch was late to react and flailed frantically to grab the book. As he was about to voice another query, he noticed the bookstore owner giving him a meaningful grin. "You can now attest to the credibility of this statement. Once you've finished reading the book, the questions you currently have will naturally be answered."

Pointing to the book, Lin Jie continued, "From what I see, your expectations of others to change their views to better suit you is simply a complete pipe dream. Why not try a hand at achieving your own goals instead? Change your strategies and trajectories, implement more subjectivity. Create the environment you want by yourself, yeah?

"It's a cutthroat world out there after all. Different species require different sustenance, hence the competition isn't that intense. Competition only gets more intense the closer the species are to one another.

"If you want to stand out from the crowd and gain everyone's attention, you would still require some new perspectives."

With the young man now closer than before, Fitch didn't know if he was imagining things, but the bookstore owner seemed to exude an aggressive pressure that was reinforced by his face partially obscured by shadows. Even though he was grinning, those dark eyes were like an absolutely daunting abyss.

Fitch peeked at the book in his arms and saw the words ***Nest of Evil*** in a strange font on the surface of a hard leather cover. At that moment, his mouth went dry.

What... What sort of answer is this?

Did he ask a question just now? I-it seemed more like a discussion... It was like he was taunting me about whether I was utilizing the right mind manipulation methods to influence the doorman.

Those words ‘Your method is wrong’ combined with the previous depiction of the doorman were clearly pointed to this question.

That means to say, this book contains the ‘correct method.’ But... Is this really alright? I had tried using this ability to cause him some trouble yet now, he’s teaching me the proper way instead?

Fitch stared at the book in hand with a puzzled expression on his face.

However, he had finally come to a realization—it appeared that this self-proclaimed “owner of an ordinary bookstore” had clearly been joking with him.

He clearly wasn’t ordinary, nor was his bookstore ordinary.

Perhaps his business was something along the lines of selling special books that contained power to transcendent beings. And it was probably why he had been invited by Ji Bonong.

Fitch couldn’t help feeling regret when he figured this out. He knew that transcendent beings would be attending the banquet, yet he never expected to meet one right at the entrance.

Moreover, from the looks of it, this person seemed much more powerful than himself. Fitch could be considered a self-taught transcendental being, and while he wasn’t able to calculate his own power level, it remained a hard fact that his own ability had been nullified.

Not only that, he had nearly made an enemy. Fitch felt that it had been fortunate that his ability didn’t take effect...

As Fitch was rejoicing for that, a hint of doubt came into his head.

But, could this single book... really have a means of making his ability stronger?

Fitch had used a mind ability not obtainable by conventional means. With enough preparation, this ability used on an unsuspecting person could even impose a mental influence up to Pandemonium-rank. Upon repeated influencing, the subject's cognition and thought process would be permanently altered.

This could be personally attested to by Fitch, and the results were very satisfying.

Was there really a 'proper method' in using this simple yet devastating ability?

Under the current circumstances, Fitch's ability had been completely ineffective, and his thoughts were seen through. In short, he had effectively lost this invisible confrontation, ending in utter defeat.

However, he was still confident in this ability of his.

This ability wasn't like any other transcendental power. It was neither innate, nor was it a skill acquired via training.

A few months prior, he had still been just an wandering musician performing on the streets to make a living. Yet on one night, he received a power sought by countless others that transformed him into a musical genius overnight.

And the cause had been rather simple.

On a certain night, as Fitch was overjoyed at having finally found his 'ticket' into this new world, an anonymous figure appeared and gave him a glass bottle with a swirling black crystalline mist of an elixir within.

According to that individual, this elixir was the 'soul' of a deceased transcendent being which could grant a powerful ability to manipulate minds when consumed. However, the downside was

that the ability had no room for growth; its strength would forever remain at the state at the original being's time of passing and would also be influenced by the deceased soul.

As for the price... These implications were of no concern to a drifting wanderer. Risks were definitely present, but at the time, Fitch was already blinded by what he perceived as a life-changing fate to have any coherent thought.

So... given these parameters, how could this deceased soul's ability be enhanced? And how would it be considered the right way?

Fitch placed the book down and stared dazedly at Lin Jie's back, the latter having already started to make his way inside. "I'll only know the answer after I've read it... This sales pitch is way more energizing than even those trending dramas on television," he muttered to himself.

But — Fitch's mind was already on the verge of reminding him—it didn't matter if this book was effective or not, Lin Jie's words had already stirred him.

The word 'cutthroat' was on point. Fitch's innermost desire was to be able to stand above the rest of his peers, to use them as a stepping stone to ascend his position, to receive the attention of many more.

He didn't want to return to the pitiful life where no one would miss him even if he died in a ditch!

Be it the intrusive mental influence or defeating the top and leading musicians, all of it was to satisfy this innate desire of his.

Indeed, simply manipulating minds to supplement me doesn't yield very impressive results, especially when there are more people involved. Moreover... that guy mentioned that my ability would only remain at Pandemonium-rank for an eternity. But what I desire... that alone would never be enough.

He scrutinized the book in hand, and just as he was about to flip it open, he suddenly realized that Lin Jie had yet to mention its price.

Thus, he quickened his pace to catch up and swiftly inquired, “M-Mr. Lin, h-how much are you selling this book for?”

Noting the movement behind him, Lin Jie broke into a smile, having hooked a potential customer on his reel. Hands behind his back, Lin Jie cleared his throat and turned over. “You are the very first person I’ve met at this banquet, so I’ll give this book to you as a celebration for our new friendship.”

...Moreover, you don’t look like you are the sort that’s very rich... But if you are able to attend this banquet, then you count as a potential customer.

Fitch’s mouth gaped as if he were a goldfish, but he was unable to feel any relief. Instead, his heart only sank.

Back when he had received that ‘deceased soul,’ he had already known that there was no free lunch in this world. Anything that didn’t cost money always had the highest ‘price tag.’

Lin Jie chuckled. “ ‘The calluses on your hands and feet will only get thicker, and coal which has been tainted by dirt will only turn darker when washed’... I hope you can fully comprehend the principles written in this book and become successful in your endeavors.”

Chapter 326: The Night Has Only Just Begun

Though Manor A16 was sprawling, it had a very clear-cut layout. On top of that, servants were spread out all over the property to give directions and ensure no guests got lost.

Under the night sky, an endless stream of guests poured in, following directions and heading to the center of the manor, converging in the massive, brightly-lit structure. The falling of snowflakes was getting heavier, and a noticeable layer of hoarfrost had already formed on the roofs.

Yet, not a single invited guest felt even a sliver of chill. The ground was also completely bone dry without wet marks caused by melted snow.

It was clear that meticulous planning had been put in by the owner when constructing this manor. The entire ground was made from a special material and had also been specially equipped with unique magical heating devices. From what Lin Jie could tell, only areas up to 2 meters above ground level had their temperatures raised. Besides allowing the snow to instantly evaporate and be swept away by air currents, it also ensured the comfort and cleanliness of the guests while keeping the scenic snow-scape.

Even if it hadn't been so exquisitely designed, the value of the manor would still be extraordinary just based on its land size alone.

Haa... As expected of Rolle Resource Development... I could already feel the dominance of such a monopolistic corporation even before I even stepped inside. This is what I call 'bountiful land.' Lin Jie gasped internally in amazement.

Together with Fitch, the two of them followed the crowd and passed by an enormous rose garden. According to the guests who chatted while they walked, this was a newly constructed area requested by Miss Li, and it most likely had something to do with

the rose she always wore.

Don't tell me it's the flower she took from my shop the other day... Sigh, just thinking about the rejection that day makes me feel a tinge of guilt...

While he had been a little worried at first, seeing Ji Zhixiu act normally when she came again to his store put his mind at rest. Yet, who knew that she was actually growing such a large field of roses in her home?

Sadly, with everything that had already happened, it was basically impossible for him to rewind time and change things.

Lin Jie shook his head and continued on the path. Along the way, he came across a few people he had previously seen on TV (which he occasionally watched when passing by the adjacent audiovisual store). These people included celebrities from various fields as well as their interviewers.

The main location of the banquet was the same as in past years on the lower three floors of this nine-story manor. The middle three floors contained all sorts of entertainment areas for guests to mingle, whereas the upper three floors were the guest rooms that provided accommodations for the next three days.

Lin Jie had always wondered what could be built inside such enormous manors. Even if every single type of room could be built inside this house, wouldn't it all get boring after a while?

Now, he finally got his answer.

All of these rooms inside were not for the owners, but for guests...

"Looks like we've arrived, Mr. Lin." Fitch turned his head to Lin Jie, giving an awkward grin and pointed to the manor doors up ahead.

The book Lin Jie had given him was tucked away inside a large pocket lining of his suit. At first glance, it didn't appear any different from a normal one, but Lin Jie suspected this hidden pocket probably had some other nefarious purposes, just that he had no proof.

After all, Fitch had recounted his past experiences on their walk here...

This poor violinist didn't seem to know how to guard against strangers. He would spill his guts out enthusiastically every time Lin Jie raised a question, overloading with all the relevant information.

This only further affirmed the thoughts Lin Jie had.

*This young man really doesn't know the ways of the world and really requires some guidance. **Thick Black Theory** is really suitable for him, heh...*

Lin Jie had given Fitch **Thick Black Theory** in hopes that he could better comprehend how the people in society functioned. He wanted Fitch to stop foolishly waiting for others to cheer for him.

Instead, if he truly wished to become a somebody, he needed 'thicker skin' and a 'blacker heart.' That was how the book put it, but putting it in practice was undoubtedly difficult...

Lin Jie only wished that Fitch could just be a normal person.

Still, after hearing about Fitch's past experiences, Lin Jie had some respect for him. While the violinist had been met with all sorts of scorn as a vagabond, he never lost this kindness he had for strangers, and that was something commendable.

With this newfound respect in mind for Fitch, Lin Jie stopped at one of the many doors into the manor. He could already witness the lively scene inside from where he stood.

Unlike the gloomy and snowy night scene outside, the inside was illuminated by bright lights. Some guests, dressed to the nines, were shuffling into the venue, while others were in conversations. Their movements, combined with their attire and their figures reflected clearly on the bright marble floor, made it seem like a dreamy sort of illusion.

"Yeah, we've here. Let's head on in." Lin Jie smiled at Fitch as he cracked a joke, "The night has only just begun."

With that, he proceeded to step in first.

Fitch nodded hurriedly and followed along. He didn't know why, but as he crossed the boundary separating the dark exterior and the brightly lit interior, he could feel as if a flurry of snow was leaking in from somewhere and stuck to his nape, sending a chill through his body and making him shiver.

He subconsciously tilted his head up and rubbed the back of his neck. At that moment, he spotted a sudden flash of light in the corner of his eye. Akin to lightning flashing across the night sky, it was as if the sky had been split.

Immediately afterwards, the ground started to tremble violently as a faint rumble of thunder echoed from afar.

Rumble!!!

The guests inside were all alarmed. They either looked into the distance or started turning on their communications devices to confirm the situation, causing quite a sizable commotion.

“Was that lightning?”

“No, no, no, unlikely. I clearly saw that beam of light rise from the ground and into the air! And it even caused an earthquake... Could it be another act of terrorism?”

“Oh my god, there's already been enough going on during this period. Why am I always present, is someone really just trying to torment me?”

“Relax, nothing will happen to the Central District, so don't worry. Besides, we are at Mr. Ji's banquet and I believe he would acquire accurate news even faster than us.”

Fitch observed the guest deep in discussion then turned back to gaze at the snowing night sky. As a transcendent being, he was able to determine that the beam of light was concentrated aether that had originally been sealed by an array but was suddenly released. And now it was surging frantically away.

Just from that along, he could already imagine the kind of massive transcendent battle going on.

He gulped and looked toward Lin Jie. “Mr. Lin... Is this what you meant by the ‘night has only just begun’?”

Lin Jie blinked his eyes with a puzzled look on his face and shrugged. “Uh... What has this got to do with me?”

Chapter 327: A Thing Or Two

As if it has nothing to do with you!

It's as if everything was in your control! Everything outside exploded the moment you mentioned the night had only just begun!

Moreover, even the weakest level transcendental being can definitely sense the discharge of aether from the surging flash. Don't act as if you don't know what's going on!

Fitch couldn't help but scream internally, nearly saying it out loud, but ultimately held it in.

After all, just looking at that seemingly innocent face only reminded Fitch of how he had been sequentially led to a trap by Lin Jie. Not only had he been played like a fiddle, his own presumptuousness was mercilessly shattered in the end. This was simply a devil who liked toying with people's hearts and spreading fear.

Lin Jie gave a shrug, genuinely displaying his innocence.

While he did appear to be somewhat of a jinx (such as how he said things would get better for everyone when Doris came to visit and half the street got blown up by a gas explosion the next day), these sorts of things didn't usually happen, so he assumed that the previous incident had just been a freak accident.

"While sometimes I can be quite a jinx, this... lightning is purely a weather phenomenon. The lightning this time round was entirely due to a meteorological phenomenon. Moreover, we are miles away from wherever it struck. You can't just pin the blame on me because of what I said; otherwise, I could sue you for defamation."

Whatever words Fitch wanted to say got stuck in his throat, and he followed up with a sheepish laugh. "Sorry... You are right, but it was all a little too coincidental, so I made an offhand joke..."

Looks like... Mr. Lin here enjoys manipulating from the shadows while

conveniently making calculations. Fitch felt like he shouldn't be bothering him any further.

Of all the hidden talents at the A16 Manor banquet, why did I have to run into him? Fitch couldn't help but cuss at himself for being nosy.

"It's alright, I never expected such a coincidence as having a lightning strike just as I finished my sentence as well. Fortunately, I'd only said something about the night and not cursed instead." Lin Jie gestured with waving arms.

Surveying the surroundings, he noticed the appearance of several men in black amidst the fading commotion. "But after this little episode, I believe that Mr. Ji should be making an appearance soon. This is the perfect time to show himself as the host of this banquet."

"Indeed..." Fitch nodded in agreement when a brunette in a long red gown came by them and whispered, "Lightning? Do both of you really think that it was lightning?"

Obviously not, no, if that was lightning, we would damn well have a problem, Fitch contemplated. *But if this owner of an ordinary bookstore in front of me says it's lightning then it goddamn is lightning.*

To show where he stood, Fitch retorted with a few rhetorical questions, "What could it be if it wasn't lightning? Don't tell me it is one of those massive battles between super-powered beings like the sort we see in television shows and movies?"

He deliberately made grandiose gestures, accompanied with whooshing sounds. "Like this?"

Mmhm... It would be better to keep my identity hidden first.

While Fitch's current goal was to locate other transcendent beings to join the ranks and find a faction of organization he could belong to, he couldn't predict what sort of transcendent beings he might encounter, so he reckoned he'd observe carefully before acting, lest another 'Lin Jie' situation occurred!

The brunette snickered, then caught herself and hid her smile. Trying her best to put on a serious expression, she replied, "But I

saw it clear as day, that flash of 'lightning' shot up from the ground into the sky. And it was straight as an arrow, which seems quite unlike lightning and more like... a sword light?"

Frowning, she continued on, "It was only for a split second, but I'm certain that I'm not mistaken. Furthermore, there was a concurrent tremor. The two events were definitely related.

"While it might not necessarily be a... battle of super-powered beings," she paused, a slight grin appearing, "cough cough, but it definitely was unusual."

This woman is quite sharp, but the frequent so-called 'gas explosion' cases in Norzin had always been caused by transcendent powers. Looks like it's keen eyewitnesses like her that noticed such things , thought Fitch to himself.

His interest was piqued, and he wondered how transcendental beings would deal with the situation he was in.

At this point, Fitch heard Lin Jie speak. "No, no, no. As I had been about to say, this isn't anything unusual. There's no need to be alarmed."

Slightly puzzled, the brunette faced this seemingly courteous and composed young man. "Oh? Why do you say so? Many people saw it..."

Lin Jie shook his head, knowing that he now needed to simplify the explanation. While he might not have researched much about meteorology, he still knew a thing or two about this basic phenomenon.

"Under usual circumstances, lightning does indeed strike from the sky and toward the ground, but this is not the case for all types of lightning," he explained, slightly smiling. "In certain special circumstances, lightning may shoot from the upper layer of thunderclouds to the ionosphere, generating what we call a 'reverse lightning.' It's exactly as we have just observed: lightning which appears to be shooting upward from the ground.

“Additionally, this type of lightning is more powerful than ordinary lightning. It releases a high energy charge and thus looks like a straight beam of light being shot out, unlike normal lightning which tends to fork.”

Lin Jie gave a shrug. “Though such phenomena don’t really explain a whoosh battle of super-powered beings... All it proves is the imminence of a storm, and one ought to start moving their clothes indoors.”

Fitch and the brunette were both flabbergasted.

Ahh, this...

While they both had a definite lack of knowledge regarding this, the confident manner and tempo in which Lin Jie explained only made them compelled to agree.

An analogy of this would be young kids listening to a teacher’s explanations in class with absolutely zero doubts about the validity of the information given.

Moreover, the logic in this theory was rather sound.

There was a lump in the brunette’s throat as she started to deflate. Still, she attempted to refute, “What... what about that earthquake...”

“That’s another simple explanation. For the aforementioned reverse lightning to occur, the storm definitely wasn’t at its early stages. Instead, it must’ve been a super-storm that has gone on for quite some while, and the heavy rainfall seeping into the ground possibly caused a change in geological structure, loosening the shallow crust of the earth and causing the tremor...”

“...” The brunette was now completely speechless. She remained silent for a moment before giving a begrudging smile and sighed. “You are well-learned indeed, and it’s no surprise you are here at an A16 Manor banquet. While I don’t understand all of it, whatever you just said seems relatively reasonable.”

She extended a hand to Lin Jie. “Yedda Eleanor, you can just call

me Yedda.”

Lin Jie shook the outstretched hand. “Lin Jie.”

Fitch casually threw in his own name, eliciting slight surprise and a double take from Yedda. Evidently, the title of ‘Wandering Genius’ finally had some use.

As the two continued their exchange, Lin Jie learned that Eleanor was from a clan that produced exorbitant silverware; the sort that would serve nobles for generations. Of course, in recent times, they had moved into crafting intricate metal accessories, ornaments, and collectibles as well.

Today, she was attending the banquet as representative of her clan in place of her ailing mother.

Midway through their conversation, the chatter all around them eventually subsided.

On the left spiral staircase at the front of the main hall, a middle-aged gentleman in a black suit was sauntering down. His age was showing, with streaks of white in his black hair, but the steel gray eyes, the same as his daughter’s, were sharp as he observed everyone from above.

The banquet’s host, owner of A16 Manor, the wealthiest man in all of Norzin, and the head of Rolle Resource Development Corporation—Ji Bonong had finally made his appearance.

Facing the crowd, he calmly ambled to the center front of the great hall. “Apologies for the extended delay, I’ve just received some news. Everyone, please remain calm.” He beamed.

He lifted his staff slightly and pointed it afar. “A storm is currently making a ruckus. My team of meteorologists managed to catch a rare phenomenon that was never recorded before, and it shall thus be named ‘reverse lightning.’ Concurrently, this thunderstorm had caused some minor ground faults, resulting in the tremors we just experienced.

“The banquet will proceed as per normal. Enjoy yourselves,

everyone.”

As Ji Bonong’s voice was drowned out by the sound of applause, Fitch and Yedda were dumbfounded instead.

Chapter 328: To Each Their Own

What Ji Bonong had said actually matched Lin Jie's explanation to a tee!

Fitch and Yedda were both sharp enough to notice one other thing. According to Ji Bonong, the weather phenomenon aptly named 'reverse lightning' was a 'rare phenomenon never before recorded and had only been named a moment ago.' This was practically something that had just received its name because it hadn't yet been seen till now.

That raised the question—

How did Boss Lin know to call it 'reverse lightning' before Ji Bonong had even announced it?

Rolle Resource Development's monopolistic position in Norzin's market came across as no surprise to anybody. As a behemoth with jurisdiction over almost the entirety of the city's main industries, they definitely had limitless resources to spare, information included.

So many rich and powerful individuals were present, yet none had bothered to send their own men to investigate the situation and instead just decided to wait.

This was because everyone knew that their speed of acquiring information would never be on par with Rolle Resource Development.

In the eyes of the ordinary folk, Ji Bonong was by their truest description of someone with hands and eyes everywhere.

But even such a person who could only determine the new phenomenon via professional analysis had actually been beaten to it by a bookstore owner.

Wait, no, this doesn't make any sense , Yedda felt she should calm down and think.

Perhaps the bookstore owner before us had some secret contacts and had someone collecting this information back when Ji Bonong was discussing with the meteorologists? This would explain how he managed to receive the information then and there, allowing him to spill the beans before Ji Bonong showed up.

But Lin Jie was previously engaged in conversation with them, and there was no way he could have conversed with anyone else. Which meant, the plausibility of this hypothesis was null.

Unless... Lin Jie already had contextual knowledge and managed to predict the deductions of the meteorologists. Or, maybe he was the first who actually spoke of the phenomenon which later on became an established fact...?

At this point, Yedda's eyes narrowed as a chill came over her.

Yedda, who was qualified to represent her clan at this banquet, naturally had a sharp mind. One that could think critically and judge the current situation.

Her thoughts were coming thick and fast, but she made an effort to conceal the strange expression on her face. Swiftly, she picked up a wine glass on the long table next to her, taking a sip and licking her parched lips.

She realized that she had been tricked by this 'ordinary' bookstore owner.

The three possibilities all seemed to suggest that this alleged 'reverse lightning' wasn't a weather phenomenon at all, but it definitely held some secrets.

If it were the first possibility, then Lin Jie... this self-proclaimed ordinary owner of a bookstore had an extraordinary power behind him—this 'reverse lightning' and those meteorologists were surely all being arranged by him. But if this did theoretically happen, this would mean he had managed to deceive Rolle Resource

Development!

This was a hypothesis so incredible it could even be considered terrifying...

If it were the second or third possibility, then it would mean that Lin Jie's words were all a bunch of hogwash. He would very likely be one of those super-powered beings that could create 'whoosh' sounds in battle. As for the 'lightning'... Yedda's intuition reckoned that it was very likely a sword light.

But regardless of whichever possibility it was, the identity and power of this young man standing before her was definitely more than met the eye!

There's absolutely no way he's an ordinary bookstore owner!

Yedda's heart was pounding madly. Perhaps she was close to seeing the other side that others in the banquet couldn't see.

Glancing around, she could see that those guests had already calmed down and were engaged in conversations and finding a dance partner for the first segment of the banquet.

Rolle Resource Development had drawn wool over the eyes of the majority, and only a select few knew of the truth.

And she was one of them.

What is the motive of this mysterious and well-dressed Mr. Lin, and what is his relation to Rolle Resource Development? These were the queries Yedda had.

On the other hand, despite having already anticipated this, Fitch still found himself utterly stunned.

As a 'person in the know,' he had obviously known that Lin Jie's words had been just a load of nonsense. However, he never imagined that this nonsense would actually be 'officially certified' by Ji Bonong.

To him, there was no other possibility but that Lin Jie had used his

own power. As for what sort of power it was, Fitch didn't know for the time being.

However, Fitch himself had firsthand experienced being completely seen through by this bookstore owner. Hence, he was leaning toward the possibility of Lin Jie manipulating the thoughts of those unknown meteorologists and using them to convey the aforementioned details to Ji Bonong.

There was one other possibility that Fitch didn't dare think about—that reverse-lightning had been 'decreed' by the bookstore owner.

While Fitch was shallow, he also knew that probably only transcendent beings of peak Destructive-ranks, or those close to Supreme-rank, wielded such power.

If it's really the latter, the book I have now... Fitch gulped, suddenly finding his inner coat pocket to be extra heavy.

There was a lively atmosphere in the air and the crowd was bustling. The only exception was at a tiny corner of the hall where a brunette in a red gown stared dazedly at her wine, while a skinny violinist appeared to be full of unease.

As for the 'culprit,' Lin Jie, who had filled their heads with these thoughts...

He was completely shocked when Ji Bonong made his appearance.

As the host made his way down the stairs, Lin Jie, while keeping the smile on his face and acting as naturally as possible, had backed away two steps and turned around, proceeding to blend himself perfectly with the crowd as quickly as he could.

He proceeded to swiftly pick up a wine glass to obscure his face and only after he made sure Ji Bonong wasn't looking at him, or just in his direction, did Lin Jie wipe off the cold beads of sweat that had formed on his forehead.

While Boss Lin seemed to have his usual calm and composed disposition, deep down, he was panicking.

What the heck...

The middle-aged chauffeur who had accompanied Ji Zhixiu to the bookstore was actually her father and the head of Rolle Resource Development, Ji Bonong!

Lin Jie stared at the wine in his glass as he recalled how he had basically made a fool out of Ji Zhixiu right in front of her father—accepting the box of expensive gifts, discussing partnership details, agreeing to attend the birthday banquet, judging Ji Bonong himself, as well as... tactfully rejecting Ji Zhixiu's feelings. Lin Jie's lips started twitching involuntarily as he remembered all of it.

Do all big shots have such a twisted sense of humor?!

How could he pretend to be Ji Zhixiu's chauffeur and servant? Unless it was a case of a father protecting his naive daughter and ensuring she isn't deceived by others again?!

Just picturing this scenario again only made Lin Jie feel even more awkward. In a sense... wouldn't accepting a gift and rejecting her feelings in front of her father make him out to be a scumbag cheating on her feelings and riches?

But what was more awkward was that Lin Jie was already present... *Mr. Ji wouldn't have set me up with no escape, would he?*

While these thoughts were running through Lin Jie's mind, he subconsciously looked toward Ji Bonong only to inadvertently meet the latter's gaze.

Chapter 329: First Dance

Lin Jie felt an inexplicable sense of guilt the moment his eyes met Ji Bonong's.

Why did it feel like he had defiled his daughter in front of him?

Logically speaking, he had only managed to fool... *ahem* , obtain a loyal customer through psychological counseling and received some not particularly expensive gifts...

Well, it really did sound like a scammer's routine. First, gaining her trust, then asking her for money through various means, bleeding her dry, and finally absconding with all the riches.

But even so, he had actually helped her solve the problem.

Moreover, Ji Bonong had come over in person for a visit and eventually left peacefully, allowing Ji Zhixiu to ask for his cooperation. That must be because he acknowledged Boss Lin was a good person... right?

Lin Jie quickly recalled the conversation he had with Ji Zhixiu at that time, as well as his words and actions. He was quite sure he hadn't spoken rudely to the top dog in the whole of Norzin and had displayed a certain degree of respect too.

Mhmm... And I even promised that I would give Ji Bonong a book when I see him.

This time, he had already placed the gift in his dream realm and brought it along. Because of Ji Bonong's status as a merchant, Lin Jie had specially chosen a book on economics, ***An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations — The Wealth of Nations*** for short.

While this book did not seem to be very useful based on Norzin's currently deformed monopolistic business structure, it was said that the Ash Chamber of Commerce had found a second passageway to

the underground which might mean that the monopoly of Rolle Resources might gradually be broken.

Besides, the book that was considered a fundamental economics work back on Earth and was known as the 'western bible of economics' would surely provide some insights.

At the very least, given Ji Bonong's ability, he should presumably be able to gain what he needed from it.

Lin Jie felt that his gift couldn't be any more appropriate and he would likely gain a new customer. So, the previous awkwardness wouldn't matter.

Moreover, he was currently a legitimate guest that had been invited to the banquet, so what was there to feel guilty about?

Shouldn't it be Ji Bonong who should be feeling guilty instead?

This top dog was really full of schemes. Previously, Lin Jie had been wondering why no one came to ask about Young Miss Ji's casual visits, nor was there the common television drama cliché of 'a large payout to stop pestering Young Miss Ji.' It turned out that her biological father had gone into battle himself... and even pretended to be a chauffeur to do his investigations!

He simply didn't show the most basic sincerity! I'll just take the suitcase of things that Blackie ate as compensation for deceiving me!

Boss Lin instantly stood a little straighter at the thought of this, covering his mouth, and gave a dry cough. He adjusted his expression and looked toward Ji Bonong with an awkward but polite smile while slightly raising the glass he had been using to cover his face a moment ago.

Ji Bonong, who was standing at the front center of the hall, froze for a moment, then his expression visibly changed.

This change could be described as complex, lasting for less than a second before it was concealed, so Lin Jie could vaguely make out some joy and...?

Lin Jie was a little surprised. There seemed to be excitement and agitation mixed in those emotions, as well as some that were much more difficult to comprehend but it made Ji Bonong's steel gray eyes light up.

But what could be so exciting about seeing Lin Jie?

However, Lin Jie's confusion only lasted for a moment, because Ji Bonong, acting like any typical host of a party, raised his glass and returned the compliment to Lin Jie.

It was as if that strange expression had all been an illusion.

Lin Jie kept his smile on and put his glass down. Shaking his head, he wondered if he might have been seeing things...

The dignified president of Rolle Resource Development wouldn't lose his composure so easily, would he? But since it's like this, I'll just let bygones be bygones and I think the cooperation with Rolle Resource Development will go more smoothly in the future...

While Lin Jie thought this, he saw Ji Bonong already moving on. Thus, Lin Jie turned back to resume his chat with the two potential customers he had just met.

But all he saw was the two of them rooted to the ground with aghast expressions on their faces.

"What's the matter?" Lin Jie walked over and waved his hand in front of their faces. "Are you guys shocked by President Ji's appearance?"

Returning back to his senses first was Fitch who quickly shook his head. He certainly couldn't ask how Lin Jie had known the matter of the 'reverse lightning' even before the exports had announced it. Thus, he gave an awkward chuckle. "Nothing much, I was just thinking... uh since it's Miss Ji's birthday party, she would definitely be here in person for the opening dance of the banquet. I wonder if she'll bring her own dance partner or choose one of the guests later..."

Erm...

Lin Jie rubbed his chin. *That's certainly a problem.*

For some reason, he was feeling a sudden sinking premonition.

Next to him, Yedda looked hesitant. Lin Jie noticed her constant glances and couldn't help but ask, "Miss Yedda, is there something you wish to say? Don't worry, ask away if there's anything you wish to know."

Yedda surveyed her surroundings, then leaned closer and whispered, "Do you know Mr. Ji? I mean, not general acquaintances like the rest of us, or business partnerships. It appears that you have some personal ties with the president of Rolle Resource Development?"

She lowered her voice further. "Just now... I saw you raising a glass to Mr. Ji Bonong, and from your name, are you perhaps also from the Northern Lands?"

Yedda had thought that 'reverse lightning' was shocking enough, yet barely a minute later, she saw Lin Jie raise his glass in a particular direction. And when she looked over to that same direction, she saw Ji Bonong returning the gesture and that scene utterly destabilized her already gobsmacked mind once more.

That definitely wasn't a polite reciprocation because Ji Bonong wouldn't return a toast from just anyone given his status. Be it pride or arrogance, Ji Bonong had every right to it. Yet, he had reciprocated Lin Jie's gesture.

Unless he took the initiative to talk to someone, even representatives of the Central District would be ignored by him. There were probably only a handful of people that would garner a reaction from Ji Bonong... and it appeared that Lin Jie had actually done so.

Yedda's speculations went a step further. *Mr. Lin is someone extraordinary. He's on familiar terms with Ji Bonong, and that probably explains to some extent how he knew about the lightning before the experts...*

Lin Jie, on the other hand, was stumped. He didn't know how to address this issue of translation. "While our names have the same style, I'm not from the Northern Lands, and I don't really have much of a relation with Mr. Ji... To be precise, I know Miss Ji."

Yedda and Fitch were both astonished. "Lady Ji?"

Lin Jie nodded. "Miss Ji is a customer of my bookstore. Well, actually, our relationship isn't really anything special. I've sold a few books to her and helped her resolve some matters. She's just an ordinary customer, at most... a trustworthy friend. She was also the one who gave me my invitation."

Yedda suddenly had a strange look on her face. "Just a friend?"

"Yes..." Lin Jie nodded.

"So you've been here, Mr. Lin. I've been looking for you for quite a while." A lady's voice sounded from behind him.

Lin Jie turned and was met with the sight of a gorgeous young lady in a stunning black evening gown. A red rose adorned her chest, complementing her brilliant iron-gray eyes and pale white skin. Her slender hand lifted the short hair by her ear, revealing a red prismatic earring.

The crowd around the four of them had already parted, giving the spotlight to the true main character of this banquet.

With a somewhat apprehensive yet expectant expression on her face, she took a deep breath and extended her hand. "Mr. Lin, may I invite you to this first dance?"

"..."

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow as he looked at the outstretched hand wrapped in a black lace glove, feeling the gazes of all the other guests around him.

Though the place and vibe were completely different, it felt surprisingly like the time they first met.

At that time, Ji Zhixiu, who had stumbled into the bookstore all miserable and soaked, seemed to be wearing a similar black evening gown... Lin Jie wondered how she felt now that things were completely different from before...

Lin Jie took the hand and smiled helplessly. "Of course."

Chapter 330: Become A Race

...How did things end up like this? Such a thought couldn't help but pop out in Lin Jie's mind when his arm was wrapped around Miss Ji's waist, his other hand holding hers and leading the first dance awkwardly under the watchful gaze of the crowd.

He could feel, from all around him, the prying eyes of guests who assumed that their gazes were secretive but, in reality, extremely obvious. He could hear the whispers of others speculating and inquiring about his background. Some even went straight to the two that had been with him, Fitch and Yedda, beating around the bush deviously to gain information.

But all of it was surely useless...

Because he, Lin Jie, was really just an ordinary bookstore owner, with no power and no money. He was the typical nobody with "empty pockets," and even his identity was made-up.

It was true that some of his bookstore's customers had quite extraordinary status. For example, Cherry, who helped falsify his identity, was one of the three Ash Chamber of Commerce Deputy Branch Heads. Joseph, who he constantly called to 'harass,' was the leader of a Central Police Unit's covert division, and there was Father Vincent, who was now a prominent and outstanding religious leader.

There were also typical customers... An example of the most typical customers was Miss Ji, who was dancing with him right then, and Ji Bonong, who could barely be counted as one.

But that didn't mean he was powerful himself.

Aside from having some insignificant transcendent abilities, Boss Lin was just so plain and ordinary.

Lin Jie could grimace deep down. Then, he froze for a split second and raised an eyebrow. *Being so prominent like this... Well, it could be*

a good thing. No! It's simply great!

The guests, curious or otherwise, had at least begun to inquire about his origins. Given these people and their statuses, it should be easy for them to find out about Lin Jie's background.

Then, they would learn that the man, who had been personally invited to be Miss Ji's partner for the first dance at her birthday party, was the owner of a bookstore without a signboard, and also that Miss Ji was one of his customers.

This way, they definitely would want to find out how such an ordinary bookstore could charm Ji Zhixiu.

It was common sense that bookstores sold books. So, naturally, it could only be the books in the store, as there was no way this ordinary bookstore owner could charm Ji Zhixiu.

And when word got out that Rolle Resource Development was distributing his books, Lin Jie's bookstore was bound to become famous.

In Norzin, Rolle Resource Development represented the trends of the entire market. All the guests present were people who had made significant contributions in their respective fields, and had been able to receive Ji Bonong's invitation, thus, most of them would follow Rolle Resource Development. When the time came, they would definitely move like the wind to take action.

In addition, the wild speculations about his relationship with Zhixiu from a perspective of public sentiment would be very beneficial for Lin Jie.

After all, there might be very few people interested in books, but when it comes to gossip... There would surely be loads.

This was really a great start for his distributorship even if by accident.

Lin Jie blissfully pondered how to best take advantage of all the people in this huge hall, and the book sales of the five trial books would turn out.

If they don't sell well, which books should I select for the next batch? But even if sales aren't good, it should still be able to make a lot of money as it's Rolle Resource Development selling them. And if they do sell well, should I maintain our hunger marketing strategy, or should I just train Mu'en further and have her start preparing the opening of chain stores with Rolle Resource Development's support...

"Mr. Lin... Are you thinking about something that made you happy?" Ji Zhixiu couldn't help whisper cautiously when she noticed.

While the young man's lips were clearly curved upward in a pleasant smile, as if he was proudly flaunting about the fact he was dancing with Miss Ji, in truth, he wasn't looking at her at all. It was clear that he was zoned out and thinking about something else.

From his steps, anyone could tell that Mr. Lin wasn't very good at dancing. Not 'very good at dancing' didn't mean he couldn't dance, just that his movements were all very basic.

However, being able to complete those steps without making any mistakes while he mind was wandering was in fact quite an achievement. Moreover, he was able to avoid the crowd that was moving around him.

"Hmm?" Lin Jie returned to his senses, putting aside the thoughts and restrained his grin. As he twirled Ji Zhixiu around in a circle to the beat, he whispered his reply, "Oh, ahem... I was thinking about some crop related issues, nurturing, sowing and reaping..."

"Huh...?" Ji Zhixiu was confused, but then came to a sudden realization and nodded her head earnestly. "I never imagined that you would also be knowledgeable in this aspect. Ordinary people like us can't compare to how learned you are."

Ah? She seems to have taken it for real... Lin Jie noticed the look on Ji Zhixiu's face and put on a straight face. "No, no. It's just that I have too much spare time and read lots of books. On top of that, I have a good memory."

At first, Ji Zhixiu had still been nervous about being in such close

proximity with Lin Jie. But when she saw that Lin Jie still treated her as before, she felt a little braver and asked in curiosity, “Is this where your knowledge about dancing comes from?”

Lin Jie hesitated for a bit. “Umm... A part of it.”

He hadn’t specifically learned how to dance before, but he did know basic dance steps.

Because back in the past when he was still a mere academic, Lin Jie had needed to attend some high-end parties to get to know some people in order to progress in his sociology-related folk customs research. To not make a fool of himself, he had learned to dance through self-study and practice.

Having spent three years in his bookstore after transmigrating, he was definitely out of practice.

“Humans are accustomed to using books to record everything, including knowledge and skills,” he added on. “It can be said that books carry all the wisdom of a particular race with the role of giving additional chances for people to experience things outside of their own. The more books read, the more wisdom accumulated. At such a level, one would perhaps appear all knowing. The phrase knowledge is power isn’t just for show, you know.”

So all of you must buy more books! Lin Jie added at heart.

Ji Zhixiu nodded her head earnestly. Deep down, she wondered if this was how Boss Lin viewed power. However, ordinary people weren’t suited to view power this way. “But for us, we also need to consider the limit of how much knowledge an individual can bear...”

Her voice trailed off to a murmur. “Rather, we should say... Indeed, there’s a limit to an individual’s knowledge. Perhaps obtaining the knowledge of a ‘race’ would be a better option.”

She had been thinking about the deeper meaning in Boss Lin’s words on that day at the bookstore, when she became the last surviving member of The Great Race of Yith that had gone extinct

in the universe.

At first, she felt that she could use the Yith's power of absolute mind control. This way, no traitor would appear within the people presided over. However, doing so was against her conscience, and she also felt that using it this way was wrong and inefficient.

But now, Boss Lin's words reminded her.

Lin Jie stared at her with some surprise. "Obtaining the knowledge of a 'race' sounds like an interesting idea. Perhaps it can be used in the study of cultural integration. However, humans aren't like ants that have a colony mentality, the so-called hive mind effect. Instead, humans are collective intelligent, with the role of the individual also..."

Ji Zhixiu's eyes narrowed as a bolt of enlightenment struck her.

That's right, collective!

She could entirely let herself become a race!

Chapter 331: The Disappearing Smile

The first song ended as the band playing in the corner came to a stop.

Dancing pairs all around the hall ended with all sorts of different moves and bowed gracefully to their partners before turning their gazes to a small area in the middle that had been deliberately vacated.

There, a couple that seemed worlds apart in their appearance had also come to a halt.

Some guests hid their secret disappointment. Others revealed disdain.

In such 'upper-class' social situations, the social dance was naturally an important part of a party's social interaction. One could more or less tell a person's background from their dance moves.

Prior to this, many present had practiced their dance steps diligently, secretly looking forward to being chosen as Ji Zhixiu's dance partner at this birthday banquet and showing off their skills...

They were all confident that with their status and ability, they would be able to obtain this honor. At the very least, this limelight would only be stolen by those comparable to themselves.

Yet unexpectedly, a fellow that had never been heard of before had popped up and became the target of Miss Ji's favor.

Naturally, these people gritted their teeth in secret. While not exasperated, they couldn't help but compare themselves to the other party. Apart from his appearance, everything else about this person seemed to be ordinary and even his dance steps were rather jerky. All in all, he was just like a simple ordinary person, and these

other guests couldn't help harboring some dark expectations, such as tripping over his feet while dancing...

Unfortunately, although Lin Jie's performance was average, he performed steadily from beginning to end and even got to chat and laugh happily with Miss Ji.

With one hand firmly holding on to Ji Zhixiu's hand and the other supporting the latter's waist, Lin Jie executed the simplest of ending poses and let out a silent sigh of relief.

Dancing and all that... was still a little difficult for someone like him who had been cooped up in a bookstore for years, especially when he still had to shield out the shifty gazes from all around him.

After the music stopped, Ji Zhixiu consciously released her hand from Lin Jie's shoulder and took a step back, lifting the hem of her skirt and bowing elegantly. "Thank you for your guidance. Each time speaking with you makes me realize my ignorance and shallowness... and I always benefit greatly."

"Don't mention it! You're an old customer of mine after all, and I've always viewed 'after-sales' service with great importance. But then, we've known each other for almost half a year. There's no need to be so... formal, we can just get along like normal friends do."

Lin Jie smiled helplessly as he watched Zhixiu, who was shining brightly today, bow toward him. He wondered if it was because Miss Ji had been at her lowest point when she walked into the bookstore on that rainy night, making her psychologically feeble in the face of Lin Jie.

Or had the first conversation which he dominated and led been too intense that she developed a mental frailty?

It just felt that... Miss Ji seemed overly deferential. In other words, she had already been 'shaped by Lin Jie.'

While such an outcome could also be considered intentional, Lin Jie would feel a little guilty if he went overboard...

Ji Zhixiu pursed her lips. For a moment, she looked fearful and

troubled, but then after a moment's hesitation, she finally nodded stiffly. "You're right. I'll treat you like a friend."

While it was extremely difficult for her to treat an entity stronger than Supreme-rank as a friend, she had to try her best to acquiesce since it was Mr. Lin's request.

"..." Had it not been for the fact that this occasion was a serious affair, Lin Jie wanted to facepalm and sigh.

Look at how stiff you are. Clearly, you aren't relaxed at all! Why does it feel like I'm giving you an order? It feels like you are being even more cautious than before!

Lin Jie was complaining inwardly when he saw a young man with auburn hair decked out in a luxurious suit approach. He held a glass of wine in his hand and gave Ji Zhixiu an appropriate smile before raising his glass.

"Long time no see, Miss Ji."

Ji Zhixiu frowned imperceptibly. The person in front of her was no ordinary noble. He was a direct descendant of a magician family and one of the more powerful forerunners of the current age. He was talented and had similarly reached Pandemonium-rank at quite a young age.

As Fitch had learned, there were many transcendent beings at this banquet.

In the past, Ji Zhixiu would have worked hard to befriend these people and gain more leverage for Rolle Resource. Furthermore, she would pick suitable collaborators among them to back herself, her father, and the whole Rolle Resource... It was a fate she couldn't avoid.

But now, with Mr. Lin as a backing, these people were dispensable.

"It's been awhile," Ji nodded.

Though such people were no longer of value, necessary courtesies still needed to be kept, thus, she made the customary introductions

to Lin Jie. “John Fred, second son of the Freds.”

She deliberated and decided not to introduce Lin Jie to John.

Firstly, Mr. Lin’s identity had to be revealed when the two sides announced their cooperation later. Only then would it be intimidating enough.

Secondly... She didn’t deem it necessary to introduce Mr. Lin to such worthless people; it would be much too demeaning.

Naturally, Lin Jie didn’t know what Ji Zhixiu was thinking. With a smile, he extended his hand politely. “Hello.”

John, on the other hand, had a strange look on his face. He didn’t offer his hand but raised an eyebrow and looked at Ji Zhixiu. After waiting for a moment, he realized that Ji Zhixiu had no intention of continuing the introductions, so then scrutinized Lin Jie with interest.

Of course, it wasn’t from embarrassment. His expression was a mixture of surprise, sarcasm, realization, and gloating.

In his opinion, there were only two situations where only one party was introduced. The first being that one party was known to everyone, while the second was that this person wasn’t worth introducing.

He had never seen this young dark-haired man in front of him, which meant that the first scenario was completely impossible.

Therefore, it could only be the second possibility... *I never imagined that this fellow is just a shield that Ji Zhixiu pulled over! She actually resorted to this just because she doesn’t want to pick one of us as a future partner...*

Smirking every so slightly, he asked, “May I ask, Miss Ji, doesn’t this gentleman not have a name? It should be fair to introduce both parties, right? That’s basic etiquette.”

Feeling pleased with himself, John’s smile widened as he continued, “Even if there is a great disparity in status, it would be way too

embarrassing to just introduce one party.”

“...?” Ji Zhixiu was confused.

Yes, it is indeed. But why aren't you so pleased with yourself instead of being embarrassed? Was the humiliation not strong enough or are you actually a masochist? But now isn't the time to be considering this.

Ji Zhixiu's gaze lingered on Lin Jie's hanging palm and her heart clenched when she looked up toward his face.

The bookstore owner's smile had disappeared.

Chapter 332: Another Way To Categorize

The professional smile on Lin Jie's face had gradually faded and he had withdrawn his outstretched hand.

In truth, he wasn't offended by the other party's cavalier attitude. He had met many people like this, both before and after his transmigration, and the numbers were too many to count.

If Lin Jie got angry every time he encountered one, his face would be as bloated as a puffer-fish.

But just because he wasn't pissed didn't mean he had to indulge the other party. He wasn't Buddha who chose not to react even when his face was spat on.

Responding to a handshake was considered the most basic form of courtesy, and yet the other party hadn't even been willing to spare this slightest bit, even if superficial. From this, it could be seen that Mr. John didn't plan on giving Lin Jie any face.

In that case, regardless of how good-tempered Lin Jie was, he no longer intended to continue showing the friendliness of a businessman.

Lin Jie spread his hands and sighed. "I'm just an unimportant bookstore owner whose name isn't worth mentioning. In terms of status, I'm indeed far inferior to everyone here."

This was probably part of the reason why Ji Zhixiu hesitated when doing the introductions as it would likely invite even more obvious malice and ridicule if she revealed such an ordinary identity before announcing his cooperation with Rolle Resource.... This is really hard on her.

However, Miss Ji seemed to have underestimated the determination of that obnoxious fellow in his bid to provoke her... Had it been someone more tactful, or in a sense, more cowardly, they probably would have

wisely chosen not to pursue the matter if she had the intention not to mention it as it would likely offend her as well.

So, this person is either a real fool or a really brazen fellow who has no fear of going against her.

While Lin Jie personally felt that it was the first possibility, logically, the second possibility was more likely. Especially so... given the condescending look that guy was giving.

It wasn't just directed at Lin Jie but Ji Zhixiu as well.

That means to say... this guy has the confidence to think that he has a higher status than the heiress of the Ji Family and Rolle Resource?

From a logical point of view, this was basically impossible. Rolle Resource was a giant monopoly that stood atop Norzin. Everyone present at this banquet could clearly recognize the weight of this colossus. No other organization could compare to it... Even in the Central District, apart from political factors, everyone else was deferential toward Rolle Resource.

But... What if viewed from an out-of-the-box perspective?

Lin Jie's eyes narrowed slightly as he uttered, "Indeed, introductions should be given to equals, but letting someone personally introduce themselves is out of respect for the other party. This isn't a big deal, but I'm afraid you, who made a mountain out of a molehill because of this, didn't come with the intention of communicating on an equal level from the beginning, right?"

John's gaze went from Ji Zhixiu to Lin Jie and he tilted his chin upward and sneered. "This isn't any small matter... plebeian."

Meaning that you, in your 'plebeian' class, can't understand the importance of such a disparity in the context of unequal status? How full of yourself.

However, John clearly felt that this arrogance wasn't enough... Deep down, he was burned with rational jealousy. John had never hidden his possessiveness for Ji Zhixiu. As far as he was concerned,

he was definitely one of the strongest contenders for a marriage alliance with the Jis of Rolle Resource.

All had been up till Ji Zhixiu invited this unheard-of fellow to have the first dance with her at her 20th birthday party.

As a noble, a transcendent being, and a talented young magician, John felt humiliated!

And now, this jealousy was telling him to put this commoner who thought he had climbed up the social ladder back in his place.

“Of course, I wasn’t talking about you, Mr. Nobody.” John made a show of throwing up his hands in a gesture of helplessness, as if he were distressed. “I know quite a bit about how commoners are. To them it might seem that distinguishing between the noble and lowly isn’t required while they always pursue their so-called equality and freedom, thinking that the nobility are fools that only know how to enjoy themselves. But...”

He gestured around. “Look. This is the place closest to Norzin’s Central District, the heart of area A. Look at all these priceless decorations all around. And them? Living on streets that start with a number, those are literally more than smelly sewers in the city plans. So how can there be an equality worth believing in?

“With all due respect, every ornament here is enough to buy hundreds of lowly slaves. Hehe, why not take a guess where these slaves come from?

“...No need to look at me like that. Oh, you probably don’t know, but it’s still legal to buy and sell slaves to people with noble status. It’s something the Central District approves of. Of course, as genteel nobles, we would never do anything to these slaves beyond reasonable requirements.

“All I’m saying is, do you understand the significance of these numbers? It itself separates the two kinds of people, not commoners or nobles.

“Just like how we distinguish the usage of various fine dining

utensils at the table. There's no need for such people to understand this etiquette by the way; after all, they would never see anything other than chopsticks, spoons, and forks throughout their whole lives. In fact, they would even grab food with their hands and gobble it down. Oh, gosh, what disgustingly dirty and inferior acts!"

John's words were full of sarcasm, but he kept a proper and polite appearance as if he was really just speaking about some aristocratic etiquette. "But you have to know, these manners and etiquette are a sign of civilization.

"And this so-called civilization is the difference between humans and animals... or rather, between humans and livestock."

Words couldn't describe the change in Ji Zhixiu's facial expression. Her face had long darkened and turned ugly. The moment John had started his monologue, she had been ready to teach this guy, who had no idea who he was talking to, a lesson he would never forget. But just as she opened her mouth to speak, Lin Jie raised his hand slightly to stop her.

She turned and saw Lin Jie calmly staring straight at John.

"..."

While that gaze seemed calm enough to call it peaceful, Ji Zhixiu still involuntarily shivered.

Because at this moment, she suddenly realized that... ever since leaving the bookstore's perennially dim light, those eyes seemed to not allow any bit of light in, leaving only an unfathomable darkness.

The hall was brightly lit, but those lively and bright scenes never reflected in those dark, black eyes.

"Actually, I think you do have a point."

Lin Jie put on a brilliant smile once more. "But since we're at this banquet, we're all just Miss Ji's guests. But if you insist on segregating classes..."

The bookstore owner smiled at John and lowered his voice. “I think there’s another way of categorizing me and you.”

Chapter 333: Go Back Home And Take A Look

Yet another means to preach about freedom and equality? These commoners are really just so adamant...

How long would it take for them to understand that every numbered street in Norzin has technically already mapped out their life trajectory?

No matter how hard they try, insignificant worms like them can't avoid being toyed with and crushed by those of a higher level...

John let out a snort of laughter. He had wanted to taunt the man with sharper words, to make him understand the cruel truth.

However, when he met those dark eyes, whatever words he had wanted to say got stuck in his throat.

The noble youth panicked for no reason.

Although the hall was brightly lit by the many dazzling lights, at this moment, John felt as if he was surrounded by an endless thick black fog. Even his vision turned cloudy for a moment.

The black fog was chaotic and disorderly, constantly flowing, and there seemed to be a prying gaze hidden deep inside.

The gaze didn't contain any malice, just curiosity as if from a baby that had just opened his eyes and seen a new world.

The curiosity was strong, so intense that it made John feel a slight chill when it came over him...

But in the blink of an eye, the hallucinatory vision dissipated as if it had been a passing glance at the scenery nearby.

The stunned John returned to his senses and saw the way in which the surrounding guests were whispering.

He suddenly realized stopping in his tirade made him look foolish. However, he didn't know what had just happened and could only say in exasperation, "Categorize? Haven't I made myself clear? With all due respect, you really shouldn't be here. If it weren't for Miss Ji, you probably wouldn't have known what Area A was like for the rest of your life. I don't think I even need to ask how you got that invitation..."

Lin Jie clapped his palms together and interrupted John. "Ah, if you want to talk about invitations... I did indeed use a backdoor, but it's Miss Ji's own decision to choose who she wants to invite to her party. Whether I should be here or not is invalid; what matters is whether she likes it or not."

John was startled by the self-righteousness shown by Lin Jie. "You —"

"Sheesh." Lin Jie shook his head and sighed. He probably knew why Ji Zhixiu had been fooled by the scumbag in the first place.

In this environment where the men surrounding her are ambitious and only think about gaining her and Rolle Resource, it probably wouldn't take long for her to find a man who did the opposite and showed her warmth...

Nodding his head, Lin Jie rubbed his chin, then continued on, "In other words, whoever Miss Ji doesn't like shouldn't be at this birthday party."

John could no longer understand what the guy was saying. He frowned. "Say, you don't really think—"

Lin Jie interjected matter-of-factly once more. "Mr. John Fred, I think it's time for you to go back home and take a look. Head out from here and take a left to reach the main gate. You should be able to remember your way home from there, right?"

John looked around, completely baffled. "Me? Home? Are you serious?"

Lin Jie nodded.

John had a weird look on his face for a moment before bursting out laughing. “Haha Hahahah...! I realize that I may have been wrong about you. You aren’t like those average plebeians—you’re a little more interesting.”

He looked toward Ji Zhixiu and pointed a finger at his temple. “Are you sure there’s nothing wrong with your guest here, Miss Ji?” Regardless of whether Ji Zhixiu knew or not, John was now beginning to suspect that there was something wrong in the head of this guy who hadn’t yet given his name.

However, Ji Zhixiu didn’t look as embarrassed as he’d expected; instead, she appeared solemn. She struggled to part her lips. “Mr. Lin... You...”

While she had an inkling of what was going to happen when Lin Jie had put out a hand to stop her, Boss Lin not letting her step in indicated that he intended to personally settle this matter.

However, all the signs now pointed to the matter escalating beyond what was anticipated.

What she was uncertain about was that fact she couldn’t determine if Boss Lin was mad or just satisfying himself with some entertainment.

“Ahhh... I almost forgot.”

Lin Jie turned to Ji Zhixiu and cleared his throat awkwardly, not knowing how to begin.

— *Actually, I possess special abilities...*

— *Sorry to have always kept this from you, but I’m probably not quite like the rest of you, for example I know a bit of magic or something...*

Either way, it would seem too abrupt?

“Oh, never-mind... I’ll explain it to you later.” Lin Jie gave the extremely flustered Ji Zhixiu a warm, comforting smile. “In any case, I won’t make things difficult for you, Miss Ji. Oh, right, make sure to call the police.”

Ji Zhixiu was not reassured by this 'reassuring' smile. "Call the police?" she asked in confusion.

Lin Jie nodded. "Yeah. Call the police. Probably inform Joseph and Claude. They would need to go save some people."

John watched the two of them talking to themselves and couldn't take it any longer. Raising his voice in exasperation, he hollered, "Miss Ji, are you willing to go against the Freds over this commoner?"

"No." Ji Zhixiu shook her head. But before joy could show on John's face, she continued, "I've never been on the same page as all of you."

John's face turned stiff and dark. He felt that his patience had reached his limit. Even though his attitude was that of someone superior mocking the lowly from the beginning, the outcome was that... he had been played for a fool repeatedly.

That's enough! John gritted his teeth and tightened his grip on the glass, preparing to go on the offensive. Since Rolle Resource didn't know what was good for them, he no longer needed to give these mortals any face... These were just a few mortals.

That's right. Even Ji Zhixiu was no more than a Pandemonium-rank, which was nothing when compared to the Fred Clan.

Though he had heard she had come into contact with some mysterious bookstore owner and received some gifts, he hadn't heard much about her since then. Why would someone high and mighty like him pay attention to insignificant ants?

Mmm, that's right...

Then, as John recalled this, a sudden chill came over his body in a flash, as if he had been shocked by electricity, causing his scalp to turn numb.

"I'm just an unimportant bookstore owner whose name isn't worth mentioning. In terms of status, I'm indeed far inferior to everyone here."

That had been how the ordinary young man introduced himself just now.

John's eyes narrowed and he quickly glanced up only to notice a servant pushing past the crowd and staggering toward him, shouting breathlessly, "Young Master John, quick, we've got to hurry back..."

John reached out to steady the servant. Unspeakable fear started to coarse through him, making his lips tremble so much that he couldn't speak.

The servant looked up, revealing a face so twisted with tears and snot. "Something happened... They... All... All died..."

John barely heard what the servant said after that. He tried his best to look back at Lin Jie, but he didn't see the young man's face. Instead, all he saw was a pure black figure standing in the middle of the crowd, bowing gracefully toward him.

Chapter 334: Intent To Murder

The dark, out-of-place shadow that had bowed gracefully vanished again in the blink of an eye, as if it were foam or an illusion.

However, the stares of others around and the servant's cries couldn't be faked.

Smash! John was dazed and the glass in his hand hit the ground and shattered, causing him to shudder. Then, as if waking up from a dream, he realized the seriousness of the problem and his heart plummeted.

Dead? All dead?

A sense of ominous foreboding made his blood run cold. His expression immediately turned twisted as he rushed forward and grabbed the servant's collar tightly. With his body trembling, he roared, "What do you mean by all dead? What exactly happened? Explain yourself!"

The servant's face was covered in snot and tears, choking and struggling to breathe properly from John's tight grip. As his face gradually turned red, he said with great difficulty, "Master and the others... they were carrying out... the slave binding ritual... Then suddenly, suddenly, everything turned black for a moment. The ritual was forcefully interrupted and the entire house collapsed after. Then it started to burn. It was too fast, too fast... I didn't know anything. I just crawled forward and ran out..."

John's eyes were those of a man-eating beast as he stared daggers at the servant before him. "You ran away?" he hissed through his teeth.

The servant was frightened but he shook his head at once. "No, no, no, I didn't run... Master asked me to find and inform you..."

John's hands tightened around the servant's neck as he face turned even more malevolent. "To inform me that they're all dead? If you

don't know anything, how do you know everyone's dead? Stop with your nonsense!"

The noble youth was unimaginably calm. At such an occasion, even if all his family members were dead, he couldn't let this matter be concluded like this! He had to... leave himself time to find a way out.

Otherwise—John thought about the guess he just had moments ago as well as the words he had just said—he, too, would be dead.

“Gurgh gurgh...” The servant panicked to realize that the young master was actually using the special incantation of the Fred Clan while speaking to him. *He's trying to kill me!*

The servant's pupils contracted as he tried to struggle and shout, yet he discovered he couldn't move nor even make a squeak.

His life-force was rapidly fading away, his face turning pale, and his pupils nearly dilated.

Tap!

A hand reached out and grabbed John's arm with such force that it almost shattered his bones.

John turned his head and met the steel gray eyes of the party's hostess glaring at him coldly, which was quickly followed by a muffled 'pop.'

He lowered his head and instantly saw the afterimage of that slender, fair arm clenching into a fist and heard a slight whistling of wind as silver-white fur and muscles enveloped it for a split second. What followed next was an unimaginable pain erupting from his abdomen, causing him to immediately let go and crumble to the ground.

“Ugh... cough!”

Curled up on the floor, John's face was twisted in pain as he writhed like a maggot. At the same time, his lower body suffered from incontinence.

Ji Zhixiu looked down from above and withdrew her fist before taking two steps back from this miserable scene. If Boss Lin hadn't stopped her, she would have punched this guy in the face.

But this was more than enough... She had controlled her strike well, and there was no superficial bleeding or a wound. However, John's internal organs had been ruptured and mashed together. Magicians without any defensive incantations were as weak as ordinary humans.

Ji Zhixiu was now in perfect control of her strength. This hadn't been a momentary exertion but sustained diffusion: first shattering the internal organs and then dissolving them into a paste. This meant that the excruciating pain constantly stirred up inside his body would last for perhaps a full hour, until John died.

In the meantime, she would augment John with Steel Resolve to keep him awake. *Trying to run after offending Boss Lin?*

While Boss Lin had already personally punished him, as a supporter of Boss Lin, she needed to express her stance.

She took a napkin from a table at the side and smiled as she wiped her hands. "It appears that Mr. John is a little too grief-stricken and can't control himself. Help him up to rest for a bit and then bring him home to take a look. The police have already been informed about the matter regarding the Freds, and the Central Police Unit will handle it accordingly. Please don't worry, everyone."

There was the faintest of murmuring from the crowd.

John, who was helped to his feet, could vaguely feel the dampness and stench coming from his lower body amidst the intense pain coursing through. All eyes were on him as he was dragged along.

The other guests were all watching him...

He didn't deal with it nor hide it. He just merely watched as he was dragged along as his most miserable side was laid bare.

This was the greatest torture for a man who was extremely proud and proud of his noble status.

“Gurgh—uhh...” John let out a faint cry of utter despair. When his eyes were open, he could see the gazes of people all around him, and when he closed his eyes, intense pain wrecked through his body. He could even hear the sound of broken bits of bone piercing into his innards.

While undergoing such a torture, he was brought to the Fred Clan mansion where flames were still flickering.

The once-glamorous mansion, the huge family building that belonged to Area A, the domain that John had described as a superior class that commoners could never imagine—was now a charred ruin.

“Unhh ... ah ...”

John opened his eyes wide and saw the kneeling bodies in the flames. These had been where his confidence and arrogance had stemmed from. Members of an ancient and powerful family of black magicians.

He was pushed to the ground and crawled forward with great difficulty, a look of utter brokenness on his face. At this point, everything he once had was destroyed.

Some remnants of the slave-binding ritual’s array still remained on the ground. This cruel ritual would cut off the slave’s tongue, gouge out the slave’s eyes, and stab the slave’s eardrum so that they could not speak, see, or hear and only accept wholeheartedly the orders of their master as if they were nothing more than pets.

It was exactly what the Fred Clan loved; an important part of the slave trade and a means of entertainment for them.

And these ‘voluntary’ slaves were from the slums of the Upper District...

Now, by some unspeakable intervention, the slave-binding ritual had been interrupted and reversed completely. All the effects had been applied to members of the Fred Clan instead.

There were only three huge cavities on the faces of those kneeling

corpses in the flames as if having been gnawed on by something. The scene was like a painting depicting hell, yet the chained slaves beside were weeping tears of joy from having just survived a calamity.

And this scene would ultimately be frozen in this moment forever in John's eyes.

Chapter 335: Next Time

Lin Jie totally understood when he saw John fall to the ground after a slight touch from Young Miss Ji.

After all, hearing news that their entire family was gone would surely make anyone weak in the knees.

When he saw Miss Ji giving orders and arranging everything in an orderly fashion, Lin Jie felt that he was seeing a different side of Ji Zhixiu and it was well worth it.

When he saw Blackie waving at him before blending back into the shadows, Lin Jie knew that there would not be any suspense.

While Lin Jie hadn't wanted to bother with this silly fellow who wanted to find trouble, after that guy started talking about his theory of status, Blackie, whom Lin Jie hadn't seen for quite some time, suddenly appeared.

While it had been a long time, the frequency of Blackie's appearances had been ridiculously high compared to the previous three years. And 'he' seemed to be getting increasingly active...

As Blackie stood behind John, Lin Jie learned all the sins and evils of the Fred Clan in an instant—forced trading, abuse, killings of slaves... They were beyond the normal jurisdiction of Norzin, allowing them to do all sorts of unimaginable things.

Thus, when Blackie politely offered to help, Lin Jie silently agreed.

As John said it, this sin far transcended human nature and rules. If it couldn't be overridden or eradicated by a higher power, then it would always remain a hidden darkness. People would no longer be equal to one another but with a difference similar to one between humans and livestock.

However, for now at least, there was still one method of classification between them. Life... or death.

This little episode became an opportunity for the opening ball to come to an end—even though it was almost over already.

Ji Zhixiu used her communications device to contact the Central District Police Unit and other relevant departments. After confirming that the matter could be resolved from the surface, she smiled and gave some comforting words to appease everyone. Then she announced the end of the opening ball and arranged for everyone to head to their rooms to rest in an orderly manner.

While Ji Bonong was the true host of this banquet, it was no longer appropriate for him to take charge in matters that involved transcendent beings.

In the past, if such a situation were to occur, he would have to seek help from the true Central District powers that were actually controlling Rolle Resource Development.

But now, Ji Zhixiu, who had gained considerable foothold among the hunter faction in Norzin, was able to resolve matters alone as a transcendent being.

And most of the time, it was usually a simple reason for transcendent beings to reason with each other—the strong preyed on the weak, and only the living were right.

So now, even the transcendent beings in the crowd, including those that had good relations with the Fred Clan, were shocked and uncertain, not daring to step up nor say anything...

After all, John had merely gone on to say some provocative words and his entire family clan was decimated. This was way too frightening even for transcendent beings!

Them calmly thinking, ‘This isn’t nothing I haven’t seen before,’ had immediately become ‘I’ve never seen anything like this before.’

More importantly, during this whole process, regardless of how they inquired, their own higher-ups didn’t seem to have any objections toward what Ji Zhixiu, who was largely representing Rolle Resource Development, was doing. It seemed as if they were all tacitly

agreeing with what she was doing.

This attitude was worth pondering over. When it was like this, they had to consider what their higher-ups were thinking if they were to make any move or speak up.

Was the long-standing rule that Rolle Resource Development had to be helmed by mortals going to change?

Ji Zhixiu's display of strength today... was beyond their expectations.

From their point of view, it had just been three people talking, then completely out of the blue, John had been knocked down by a punch from Ji Zhixiu and his family mansion had an incident.

And the reason being... the only ordinary human amongst the three was definitely the fuse. However, a deeper reason they believed was that Ji Zhixiu was using this opportunity to show off her strength.

This name, which wasn't yet prominent in Norzin, was destined to leave a dazzling mark amongst the transcendent community from tonight onward.

Rolle Resource Development Corporation, which had always stood between mortals and transcendent beings, seemed to have taken a step toward the transcendent.

Other guests harbored their own guesses and speculations, but in the end, they could only put these thoughts aside as they dispersed as servants guided them to their respective rooms. Whether they investigated further in secret, no one knew.

"Mr. Lin, the higher-ups guarantee the Fred family name will never appear in the Central District ever again. Moreover, the slaves that were rescued will be taken care of properly with an investigation to prevent such things from happening ever again. Please rest assured," Ji Zhixiu said softly to Lin Jie while she felt a sense of joy deep down.

Before this, she had never heard the Central District authorities speak with such a cautious tone and stance. They even tried asking

whether Boss Lin had other needs, but... Ji Zhixiu would not tell anyone about the collaboration yet. As for anything else, she replied that she didn't know.

“Joseph and Claude are on other missions and couldn't rush over to help, so their colleagues went to Fred's mansion to handle the situation. However, the higher-ups said that their support was from afar, so they couldn't rush over to help. So, it was their colleagues who went to Fred's mansion to clean up the mess... Nevertheless, the higher-ups said that they still provided good support and contributed to this effort, so the credit still belongs to them.”

Ji Zhixiu couldn't help but cuss inwardly, *Where did this good support come from? Secret Rite Tower is currently engaged in a fierce battle with the Corpse Devouring Sect! Who even has the time to care about...*

It was just because Boss Lin had mentioned it, so they had forcibly pushed the credit onto Joseph to try and gain Boss Lin's goodwill.

Including the current battle ongoing elsewhere, given Boss Lin's previous stance, the Central District had even been very hesitant about getting involved.

It seemed that the Central District authorities had quite an understanding of Boss Lin's strength.

“Oh.” Lin Jie blinked, feeling a little confused... *Why had Joseph gotten credit even though he hadn't gone?* However, this was also a good thing, and there wasn't any reason to feel conflicted.

Nevertheless, Lin Jie was surprised that the police had arrived on scene so quickly. After all, the Central Police Unit would always arrive late whenever those gas explosions occurred...

Ji Zhixiu continued on, “By the way, the Fred family's area A manor would be vacant once it's been cleared out. I've already bought it... and wonder if you are interested in taking over the place?”

Lin Jie's lips twitched. He really couldn't understand how she could say it in such a casual manner.

It's fine... This probably means my customer is growing well. Moreover, the first thing she wants is to repay those that once helped her. I should be gratified instead!

He thought about it carefully and nodded. "Yes. If the collaboration goes well in the future, I'll consider opening a branch in the Central District. At that time, I might be able to use it. If you don't have any other uses of it, could you help me hold on to it first? Of course, in return, you can look for me anytime if you have any problems in the future."

Ji Zhixiu nodded. "I'll definitely keep it safe for you."

Lin Jie nodded his approval, then suddenly froze. He realized that Miss Ji wasn't surprised at all that the entire Fred Clan were no more...

This is way too natural! How could she accept it so easily?

To think that he had been preparing for so long to tactfully say that he was actually a transcendent being. In the end, just as Lin Jie wanted to mention this, Ji Zhixiu's icy calm manner made it feel like the wrong timing.

Having already finished the chat but suddenly adding in "Actually, I'm a transcendent being..." would be too weird.

Never-mind... I'll mention it next time.

Chapter 336: You-You-You-You

After Lin Jie and Ji Zhixiu finished their conversation, Lin Jie kindly declined Young Miss Ji's offer of sending him to his guest room. Only after watching her leave did he return back to Fitch and Yedda, who were both waiting at the side all this time and finally had the courage to approach him.

Lin Jie turned around, slightly surprised. "Ah, it's you two. My apologies for speaking with Miss Ji for so long..."

"Nonono, it's alright; your matters are more important." Fitch was quick to wave both his hands but was slyly observing the still warm smile on Lin Jie's face. He was now absolutely sure that Lin Jie must have been the source of all the strange happenings!

From the 'lightning' that streaked across the sky to the 'earthquake,' and seeing how the entire Fred Clan had just been recently decimated, Fitch was a hundred percent certain this was all Lin Jie's doing!

Ji Zhixiu's attitude toward him alone was more than sufficient to determine how powerful this self-proclaimed ordinary bookstore owner was.

Most guests would wrongly perceive that this was Ji Zhixiu's intrinsic gracefulness as a host, thinking that how she treated Lin Jie was just a form of courtesy.

However, a drifter like Fitch, who had seen all sorts of servile and subservient people, had a keen eye for those who were giving genuine praise and those that only showed pretentious courtesy.

Ji Zhixiu definitely treated Lin Jie as someone superior!

He made up his mind on the spot to become the biggest boot-licker. With great enthusiasm, he took the initiative to ask, "Uh... Mr. Lin, since today's dance has already concluded, shall we return to the resting area together? I'd heard from a nearby servant that all male

guests are assigned to the third floor. I remember seeing the number indicated on your invitation and our rooms aren't far from each other. Since they are along the way, why don't we head back together?"

In actuality, Lin Jie had only flashed his invitation twice, so how could Fitch see what was on it. He was just trying any excuse to walk with Lin Jie.

Yedda hesitated at the side, eventually deciding that this young man with a mysterious identity was too dangerous to approach.

Although she was rather intrigued about these transcendent powers and other such things, once she took the time to calm down and think through it, it made her realize she needed to be responsible for the clan. She had to seek the safer benefits and couldn't bear the potential high risks of getting involved.

In contrast, it was far safer to secure the trust of those who are sure to aid in the future of her clan.

Yedda gently lifted the seams of her dress to give a curtsy and smiled. "My apologies, but I still have some matters to attend to and will be taking my leave first. However, if Mr. Lin has any requests, feel free to contact me anytime." She took out a business card and gave it to the bookstore owner.

The two of them now had more prudent looks on their faces than before. While they attempted to act naturally, their caution was still clear.

Unlike other guests who were ignorant of the truth, both of them already knew that Lin Jie wasn't normal, and whatever had happened left a lasting impact on them.

Lin Jie accepted the business card and replied with a grin in return, "No worries. I welcome you to patronize my bookstore as well."

After Yedda left, Fitch took it upon himself to be Lin Jie's diligent guide and lead the way.

Though Lin Jie had received a special invitation from Miss Ji, she

knew the discreet personality of the bookstore owner all too well and didn't make any special arrangements for his accommodations, allowing for him to stay among these ordinary guests.

From her understanding of Boss Lin, the sort of environment he preferred was to be hidden amongst the crowd. However, regrettably, Fitch's and Lin Jie's rooms were some distance apart.

"306 and 377. This is your definition of 'close by'?" Lin Jie took a look at his own invitation, then Fitch's, amused and somewhat speechless with the current situation.

There were a total of 200 rooms on the third floor, and one of their rooms was basically at the start while the other was in the middle. This was in no way close by at all.

Giving a sheepish laugh, Fitch replied as naturally as possible, "I probably misread the invitation because it was dark outside. But since it's along the way, let me send you to your doorstep. I've always been a systematic person, so please allow me to do so."

He seemed so sincere that Lin Jie felt that Fitch might just kneel down on the spot and hug his leg should he refuse.

Lin Jie shuddered at the image in his mind. In order to avoid such a thing from happening, he reluctantly caved in. Along the way, Fitch continued to dig for information about Lin Jie's bookstore. He queried about the other books for sale as well as the kind of patrons that visited.

At first, Lin Jie even had some suspicions that this fella might be gay, but these topic brought up by Fitch revitalized him.

Lin Jie was a natural when it came to sales tactics and pushing his own wares. By speaking with fervor and eloquence, he could basically make it sound as if his bookstore had the ability to possess any book one might desire... But of course, he did have every single book.

"Customers... Umm, although the saying goes 'a fragrant wine fears no dark alley,' those that can actually smell the fragrance and have

the ability to appreciate it are few and far between.”

Lin Jie carefully tweaked the truth about how the bookstore was usually disregarded by many. “However, though my bookstore has few patrons, each and every one of them is someone worth guiding. Whether they have worries in business, life, or other matters in general, all are welcome to visit the bookstore. It’s not just the power in the books. I can also lend some of my help to them.”

Fitch nodded and made a silent note of it. *The bookstore has certain criteria when selecting a customer—they need to possess potential yet need to have desires that can be manipulated. They can rely on the power in the books to solve their problems but can also approach the bookstore owner for help.*

But one key question still remained...

“Then, what about the price?” asked Fitch solemnly.

“Huh?” Lin Jie was slightly taken aback. *What’s with this sudden escalation?!*

“Books are sold according to price listed, do pay close attention to any discounts available. There’s a loan fee of 10 dollars for borrowing books, and additionally, you get a free cup of bubble tea from the book cafe next door if you spend 200. But if you seek me out to help with your problems... That is a free service.

“Although, most of the time, as a way of expressing their gratitude, my customers would bring me some local souvenirs,” Lin Jie added on nonchalantly.

“Local souvenirs?” Fitch asked, slightly baffled.

Lin Jie walked toward the door of his designated room. As he opened the door dramatically, he nodded. “Yes. Souvenirs. For example, I have a certain customer who loves to give me statues...”

As Fitch listened intently, the door of the neighboring room opened abruptly as a smartly dressed youngster stepped out with a communications device in hand. “...Sir Joseph is currently in a massive battle! Did you even know that?! Obviously not! Otherwise

you wouldn't have asked me to partake in this damned banquet. I wanted to join him on the battlefield and fight alongside him, dammit! This abomination and sham of a banquet isn't where a true fan should be! What's more, I am his disciple! An apprentice on probation is also a disciple!"

This youth seemed a mere teenager with freckles decorating his tender face. While airing his grievances into the communications device, he closed the door behind him. And as he turned around, he was met with Lin Jie standing just beside him.

He first froze up, then rubbed his eyes in panic as if suspecting his eyes were playing tricks on him. Then, almost immediately, his entire body started trembling and his communications device fell to the ground.

Terror gradually took hold of his face. "You-you-you-you—"

Chapter 337: Lin Jie And The American Cockroach

“You-you-you—you—why are you here?”

The freckled youngster stared at Lin Jie in horror as if he were a cat whose tail had just been stepped on. Beads of cold sweat formed on his forehead as he stammered and backed away.

He subconsciously reached out to grab his weapon, but the situation had caught him off guard as he grabbed at air. How could he have a weapon on him in such a place?

I’m done for! Greg felt his vision turning dark as he sank into despair.

A few months prior, Greg had transformed into a black cat to investigate the situation in the bookstore. However, on that dark and rainy night, he had witnessed his idol, Joseph, being taken down effortlessly. The psychological trauma from that encounter with the terrifying threat seemed to have enveloped him once more, and that very scene was still vivid in his mind.

The young magician gritted his teeth. He couldn’t give up yet! Even though it seemed like there was an ordinary mortal beside them, Greg couldn’t care less... He had already scoured the terrain of the entire manor and there were three vents in this corridor alone, with the nearest at the corner less than ten meters away. As long as he could rush over at his fastest speed, he would still have a chance to escape!

Then, he would inform the Tower to make preparations... At the thought of that, Greg suddenly froze in place and his intentions of transforming into a cat came to a halt.

Wait a minute, how can the Tower not know that this monster has left the bookstore?

“Hmm...?” Lin Jie observed the youngster quickly retreat and stick to the wall as if he had just seen a ghost.

The latter’s expression warped so quickly as if he had been eating an apple, then noticed a worm in it. Then, a sudden realization hit him that there was only half a worm remaining. His face was pale, and his entire body was trembling furiously.

“Hey... Kid, are you alright? You don’t seem well. Do you need help?”

Out of humanitarian concern, Lin Jie took a step forward and reached out to try and support this young stranger who seemed to be on the verge of collapse.

Greg’s pupils constricted, but he had already missed the opportune time. He was certain that at such a close distance, it would be easy for this monster to control or kill him.

In other words, escaping was futile and all he could do was await his death...

Ahhhhhh! Don’t come over!

Lin Jie placed his hand on the young man’s shoulder. The latter’s eyes were tightly shut, and his lips were trembling. Fear was written all over his face, which surprised Lin Jie even more.

This didn’t seem like a breakdown. It was more like the reaction of seeing a 10-centimeter-long and sleek American cockroach flying toward one’s face...

And the person seemed to be afraid of Lin Jie?

Am I really that scary? Deep down, Lin Jie shook his head. He was certain that he had always been amiable and definitely didn’t have the sort of fierce face that people would find scary upon a first encounter.

At the very least, not till the extent of being comparable to an American cockroach, right... Thus, Lin Jie deduced that the problem didn’t lie with himself but was probably an issue of the

young stranger's.

Perhaps, this kid, who seemed like one from a noble family, was the sort of child that was pampered dearly and rarely interacted with others, so much so that he suffered from some form of serious social anxiety?

Lin Jie felt that this guess made sense.

After all, the other party seemed to be speaking smoothly into the communications device just moments ago but had suddenly become like this... It didn't make any sense other than a relapse.

In any case, since the young stranger was staying in the room here meant that he must be a guest. However, Lin Jie hadn't seen him at the opening ball downstairs, so it was likely that he was hiding in his room due to his social issues.

But from the conversation Lin Jie had overheard, didn't it seem like the youngster had been forced by his family to come over and socialize?

What a pitiful child. With a sympathetic look, Lin Jie put his hands down and backed away slightly. At the same time, he put on his most gentle smile and commiserated, "Sorry, sorry. Do you want me to get a doctor? Or, um... Though it might sound like I'm slightly boasting, I'm quite experienced in dealing with such situations and perhaps I can help you calm down a bit..."

Greg felt the vice grip on his shoulder finally let go, and he loosened his clenched teeth when he heard the monster say that he wanted to help him 'calm down.'

His heart sank. This 'calming down' was definitely something bad!

'Dealing with such situations'; could it mean that I've been recognized somewhere or even exposed?! If so, what the monster was going to do next is obvious—he's definitely going to silence me!

Greg's heart pounded. His eyes widened as he jumped to the side and exclaimed loudly, "No, no, no. No need, no need too. I'm fine. Very fine!"

Lin Jie was stunned. “Are you really okay? I think...”

“It’s completely not necessary! Not at all!” Greg reiterated as he crossed his hands into an X. “Thank you for your concern. I feel much better now.”

While he didn’t know why, it seemed like the monstrous bookstore owner didn’t have the intention of starting a massacre on the spot. Instead, he was warning Greg not to expose his identity...

In that case, as long as he stayed alive, there was hope. He needed to keep his life first and foremost so that he could figure out what to do!

This wasn’t fear but the professionalism of an investigator!

“You sure?” Lin Jie looked at him skeptically and realized that the youngster’s pale face had returned back to normal and was even ruddy. The worry he had eased a little, but he still added kindly, “The condition you showed just now appeared rather serious. You must be honest if there’s any problem. You can’t joke around with your own well-being.”

Greg gulped as he met Lin Jie’s sincere gaze. *“Don’t joke around”... This is a threat! It has to be a threat!*

If he exposed Lin Jie’s identity or revealed any information, the monster would definitely attack him!

He shook his head vigorously. “I’m really fine!

“Just now, um, just now, I was abruptly given a scare by someone. It’s an old issue of mine. My reaction to that scare was just a little too much, ha-ha...”

Lin Jie was enlightened. “Ah, I see.”

Phew... Greg wiped away the sweat on his forehead. He had finally dealt with this problem.

Fitch suddenly chimed in glumly, “It didn’t seem so, though. This kid looked to be very afraid of you, Mr. Lin, perhaps he might have

some unspeakable notion.”

Haaa?! Greg looked at the guy whom he initially thought was an ordinary mortal at first and met the latter’s competitive and hostile gaze.

After his attention had been diverted away from Lin Jie, he suddenly realized that this person was also a transcendent being!

And there was something strange about the aether waves...

Lin Jie shook his head and chuckled. “Why would that be? I’m so ordinary. Do I look scary? Don’t you think so, young friend?”

Lin Jie’s gaze shifted back to Greg. The latter, who had been in thought, immediately felt his hair stand on end. Under this pressurizing gaze, he nodded stiffly. “Yes, you aren’t scary at all!”

Chapter 338: A New Victim

That's right... How could I, a good person, make others tremble in fear at the sight of me?

With a slight smile, Lin Jie nodded his head in approval. "Oh, I heard you mention the name Joseph. I coincidentally know someone by the name of Joseph too. He's from a special department within the Central District Police Unit and has a disciple by the name of Claude. Is he perhaps the same person you were talking about just now?"

Greg winced as he now gained a greater understanding of what Sir Joseph meant when he said the bookstore owner liked to act and speak as an 'ordinary mortal.'

Since that additional fellow who seemed like he wasn't up to anything good beside them was also a transcendent being, Greg reckoned that there was no longer a need for him to hide anything.

However, this demon was still putting on an act of an ordinary person who knew nothing. Yet every time someone slightly wavered and wondered if the bookstore owner was really an ordinary person, that monster would seem to see through it and inadvertently say something creepy that would cause this unrealistic imagination to come crashing down.

This is how he repeatedly toys with the hearts of people. That's just downright sinister!

Greg felt that he had completely understood the nature of this demon. Wasn't it just cooperating? As an investigator, he needed to be able to adapt to any situation, and this sort of pressure was still something he could bear.

"Yes." Greg nodded and said, "I was just accepted as an apprentice on probation by Sir Joseph about half a year ago. Claude is considered my senior."

"I see." Lin Jie nodded. "It seems that Claude was seriously injured previously. Is he alright now? Sigh, the work at the Central District Police Unit is really dangerous, I wonder what sort of mission would cause him to get hurt so badly..."

It's all thanks to your subordinate, 'Faceless Black-Scaled Man,' Wilde!
Greg wanted to yell out but held his lips.

As a member of the Intelligence Division, Greg had heard countless versions of intelligence reports and analysis about Lin Jie.

During the incident where Oswald had rebelled, had it not been Wilde exacerbating the situation, Claude would have been able to fight back against Oswald just based on his strength alone.

While Oswald had been the root cause, Wilde's motive was to repair the stone gargoyle that had been originally given to the bookstore. Therefore, the mastermind that guided him must have been the owner of the bookstore, Lin Jie.

The bookstore owner loved conjuring plots and causing disputes from the shadows. This was the consensus that all transcendent beings who knew of his existence came to. It had also been because of this incident that Joseph would be clashing with Wilde on the battlefield again.

Yet, in the end, the mastermind was still pretending to be innocent...

Really, what a warped sense of humor...

Despite all that went through Greg's mind, he chose his words cautiously. "Claude is almost recovered, but he can't move freely yet, so he didn't accompany Sir Joseph to... uh, carry out the mission."

That was close. I nearly mentioned the eradication of the Corpse Devouring Sect.

In theory, the being standing before him was most probably the true leader of the Corpse Devouring Sect... If Greg had said it out loud, he would surely be dead!

Greg was terrified, every single word he uttered felt as if it possessed the power to decide his own fate.

Lin Jie did not notice the meaning behind Greg's slight pause. However, he was rather relieved when he heard the news. While Claude wasn't a customer of the bookstore, he had contributed quite a bit. If something happened, Lin Jie would definitely be worried.

Fortunately, it didn't sound like a big problem now.

"That's good. By the way... Is Joseph on some dangerous mission again? There were some things I wanted his help with, but..." Lin Jie asked, "Do you know the specifics?"

Greg stammered, "Ah, um... well, it's dangerous, but this sort of thing can't be discussed outside. I mean, we usually can't tell outsiders about this sort of mission." As he spoke, he glanced at Fitch from the corner of his eye. It was obvious who he was referring to as an 'outsider.'

That smug and hostile gaze from this fellow when he said the truth about Greg being very afraid still seemed to linger.

Via his own professional sense, Greg reckoned that this fellow was probably trying to use him to show his own worth—the worth of a lackey.

If this guy tried to stir up trouble, Greg felt that his true thoughts might really be exposed. Thus, for his own safety, it was better to send this guy away first.

Lin Jie rubbed his chin and felt that this made sense. The Central District Police Unit did undertake dangerous and difficult missions, most of which had to be kept confidential.

Thus, he turned to Fitch and said, "Fitch, we can part here. It's getting late, go back to your room and rest." Then, Lin Jie added politely, "Thank you very much. I'll see you tomorrow."

"I..." Fitch could only manage one word before he was quickly smothered. His face was full of hurt. He wanted to say something

but couldn't. He didn't have an appropriate reason to and he didn't dare disobey Boss Lin. Thus, he could only groan an acknowledgment and turn to leave. However, he didn't forget to glare at Greg as a warning before he did so.

It was all thanks to this kid that he missed the opportunity of getting to know Boss Lin better! It appeared that his intuition that this kid would hinder him from cozying up to the powerful bookstore owner had been spot on indeed. It was just that Fitch hadn't reacted fast enough and was actually beaten to it...

Who could blame Fitch for having a strong sense for things. After all, this youngster that had shown up was the second transcendent being he had come into close contact with since the banquet started. Moreover, the way he behaved was rather strange.

The opportunity that had been solely his was now about to be stolen, so naturally, Fitch felt he needed to take action. However, it didn't seem to be effective...

"Oh right." Lin Jie suddenly stopped Fitch, who turned around in surprise only to hear Lin Jie say earnestly, "Remember to finish reading that book when you get back. It will be very helpful to you."

"..." Fitch nodded numbly and turned to leave.

Although the only outsider had left, Lin Jie felt that it was unreasonable to discuss a conspiracy in the corridor and thus invited Greg into his room to sit down and have a chat.

Haa, my room is rather large... Lin Jie lamented as he looked around his room. This was indeed the manor of the richest man in Norzin.

He picked a chair and sat down. Turning to look at Greg, who appeared apprehensive, he said, "Alright, we can talk now."

Greg felt like he was sitting on pins and needles, and for a moment, he was confused. *Say what ?!*

Aren't you the mastermind?! Do you even need someone to explain the current situation for you?!

Greg was a mere insignificant investigator. While he was Joseph's disciple, it was actually just in name. It was easy for him to obtain information, but there was no way for him to get any higher-level information. With regards to the current situation of the battlefield, he might not even know as much as any other ordinary personnel of the Intelligence Division.

Just the thought of this deflated Greg. He was a magician after all, and it was rather reasonable for him to be a little out of place in Secret Rite Tower which was dominated by knights...

Lin Jie noticed the youngster's head droop slightly in dejection. Thus, he flashed his usual professional smile and asked, "What's wrong? Are you troubled by something? If you really can't mention anything about the mission, you can just talk about something else. I might be able to help you."

Books can help you, too , supplemented Lin Jie inwardly.

Chapter 339: Straight Balling

“!!!”

Greg froze when he heard that before shuddering and immediately raising his vigilance.

Here it comes... The technique often used by the bookstore owner, mentioned in so many reports.

Starting a topic, as if it's a normal conversation to talk about one's woes while the bookstore owner played the role of a nice and good person. Yet in reality, that was all to entice the target into letting down their guard as traps were systematically weaved in, awaiting for the target to be caught.

Then, as the conversation gradually progressed, the rhythm would become entirely dictated by the bookstore owner as the target's way of thought subconsciously fell into his control.

When one's information started to be revealed, the trust in the bookstore owner would also strangely reach an unfathomable level. The sort where one could sell their souls to the other party willingly.

Up till now, anyone that had entered the bookstore or interacted with the owner of the bookstore would basically become a fan of this demon as long as they didn't show any clear signs of hostility.

It was as if someone had tampered with their perception... No, while Secret Rite Tower had yet to witness this process, they believed it to actually be some form of mind manipulation by the bookstore owner.

As for those that displayed hostility... they were pretty much rotting in their graves.

Greg had felt worried the first time he heard about this. His idol, Joseph, had been one such person.

Fortunately, Joseph remained rational and had an objective evaluation of the bookstore owner. He also had a clear understanding of the harm that the bookstore could cause.

The things that the bookstore owner asked of him had always been good, so Joseph had always helped him out of kindness.

...At least, that was what Greg thought. He attributed this to Sir Joseph's own personal will.

It really was like Sir Joseph to rely on his faith in justice to defeat the despicable methods of the owner of the evil bookstore!

While Joseph, who was at his lowest at that point of time, had been defeated by this demon in a moment of carelessness, Sir Joseph was still Sir Joseph. His indomitable will that burned like a flame was most worthy of following.

Therefore, as Joseph's apprentice on probation, he, Greg, could not embarrass his teacher in the face of the same trick!

Greg silently took a deep breath and steeled himself. He reminded himself not to reveal too much information and just casually mention a few words about his woes...

Thus, Greg uttered softly, "I was originally from another department and, in fact, should be considered an external staff and didn't come from the Training Division. It was only later that I was valued by Sir Joseph and joined the Intelligence Division.

"Before this, I could only be considered a part-timer. To my colleagues... It looks like I pulled some strings to get where I am." Greg couldn't help smiling self-deprecatingly.

A greater reason was the high-profile way in which he spent on fan activities touching upon his idol. When people asked about it, they would assume it was connected to Joseph taking him on as a disciple.

As for his ability? In fact, that didn't matter. Regardless of whether he was weak or strong, they only saw him as someone who did things that ordinary people thought were ridiculous and

extravagant.

They gave him weird looks and gossiped behind his back... Even if there was no malice, Greg certainly felt uncomfortable. It was like being ostracized.

Greg certainly didn't usually complain to anyone in Secret Rite Tower, or to his family.

However, the person in front of him was neither a colleague nor a relative. He was an 'enemy' that he had only met once (and in the form of a cat).

There was no burden nor shame, and it did seem that... he was the perfect person to talk to?

However, such things would be too easy to use against him, so Greg would never reveal these dark histories to this demon. A degree of ambiguity as such was good enough.

Lin Jie crossed his arms and rubbed his chin as if in thought. "So that's how it is. Annoyance because of prejudice... It's indeed a problem that can't be overlooked."

He took a sip of his freshly brewed tea and continued, "I think you are probably averse to discussing this with others because their words and actions have already hurt your self-esteem. As a result, you don't wish to care about how they react even if they hear your side. In any case, even if they see the error of their ways, whatever they have done and its effect on you wouldn't have any change.

"In that case, why hope that these ignorant people change the way they view things? Telling others would only make yourself look childish, am I right, Greg?"

The startled Greg stammered, "How...how did you..."

"How did I know?" Lin Jie gave a cryptic smile. *I'll tell you, I've seen many teenagers like yourself and aren't their problems always rather similar?*

At this moment, Greg cursed himself for being stupid. Everyone

knew that the bookstore owner was omniscient. Was there a need to ask such a simple question?

But... this was undoubtedly the true thoughts he had.

Lin Jie parted his hands and continued, "It's just some simple psychological knowledge and tricks. If you wish to learn, I can teach you."

Greg shook his head quickly. "No, that won't be necessary!"

Deep down, he breathed a sigh of relief, realizing how close he had come to falling into a trap. However, it didn't matter now. He was still clear-headed and absolutely wouldn't take the bait.

Humph, demon?

As long as he was determined enough, there was no way he would allow himself to be manipulated.

"Alright." Lin Jie regretfully withdrew his intention of pulling out a book. "How about you treat me as a tree hollow?"

"A tree hollow?" asked the puzzled Greg.

"Tell the tree hollow what you can't tell others, like your troubles and secrets. It wouldn't respond, nor would it spread. It wouldn't even have any opinions. It will just listen quietly, so you wouldn't worry about it after.

"While I can't compare with a real tree hollow, you and I are practically strangers. I definitely won't be going to talk to your colleagues deliberately, so telling me all your woes is equivalent to venting to a tree hollow.

"Sometimes, keeping everything in for too long can be really uncomfortable."

Lin Jie revealed his signature friendly smile and said, "What do you think about that?"

Even though that had been what he said, Lin Jie had already

silently broadened ‘confide your troubles to me’ into ‘confide your secrets to me’...

To retain his customers, besides having good products, he needed to be more flexible as well.

Greg hesitated as he observed the kindly smile before him. This suggestion had been his exact thoughts...

Yes, we would just be talking about some unimportant things and not leaking the Tower's plans. It's fine, it's just talking...

Ah, no no no no, what am I thinking about!

This is the start of the demon's trickery. I mustn't trust him! I have to control myself!

However, if I talk... wouldn't I be able to gain the trust of this demon and perhaps obtain the key to turning the situation around and proving my value?

Greg was in a tangle for quite a moment before he gritted his teeth and said, “It’s actually not a big deal. Perhaps I will feel more at ease if I say it, but I have a question and I hope to know your thoughts on it.”

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow. “My thoughts?”

“Yes.” Greg nodded. “If my teacher... Sir Joseph, if he were on opposing sides with Wilde, who do you think would have a better chance of winning?”

Chapter 340: Call

Lin Jie was stumped. *What sort of question is this?*

For some reason, it was vaguely like the age-old question of whether he would save his girlfriend or mother if they both fell into the water at the same time.

Lin Jie took a sip of tea to hide the strange expression he had.

But... Joseph and Wilde. Lin Jie thought that these two old friends were close to reconciling, so why did it sound like something bad was about to happen?

Greg was a disciple of Joseph after all. He definitely wouldn't be asking this for no reason. The most likely possibility was that the two were already on opposing sides.

Could it be that the misunderstanding of Old Wil joining an MLM company has not been resolved yet? No, no, no... With Old Wil's personality, he probably wouldn't even bother to explain.

And Joseph with his irritable and straightforward temper... As long as he makes a decision from the facts he knows, he would definitely follow his instincts and not listen to any explanation.

Such a vicious cycle would cause the misunderstanding between those two to continuously worsen...

Assuming that the relationship between the two of them continued to deteriorate, Greg, a kid who had just been accepted as Joseph's apprentice less than a year ago, naturally wouldn't be too aware about the long standing animosity between the two, nor would he care about any misunderstandings.

In fact, even Lin Jie himself didn't know what exactly happened between the two of them in the past. He only knew that Joseph's missing arm was related to Wilde and that the reason Wilde lived in seclusion was also because of Joseph. It was easy to imagine how

tragic the conflict between the two could be just based on these.

As for the current question, there weren't any basic conditions, so it was impossible to come to any conclusion.

Therefore, Greg probably wasn't here to ask who would win. He just wanted to hear the conclusion that Joseph came out on top.

Now, Greg had really given Lin Jie a conundrum indeed. The difficult part didn't lie with the answer.

Based on Lin Jie's understanding of these two people, if the conditions were completely fair, Joseph would definitely lose in a situation that required him to compete with his brain. Of course, if it were a fistfight, skinny Old Wil would probably crumble to a single punch of Joseph's.

Thus, it was easy to make a simple conclusion. But, to put it bluntly, Greg clearly didn't want a rational analysis but to hear others praise his teacher...

Most of the time, there wouldn't be any problem abiding by a customer's wishes. However, both the parties involved knew Lin Jie. Would he still be able to do his business as per usual if any one of them found out about what he said today?

Lin Jie stroked his chin and pondered for a moment, then eyed Greg and asked calmly, "What do you think?"

That's right!

At such a time, the best solution was to place the initiative back in the other party's hands, steering him along and following whatever he said.

Heh, you're the one who came to these conclusions. What does it have to do with me? thought Lin Jie smugly.

"Eh?" Greg was taken aback. He never expected the question to be thrown back at him.

His heart trembled as he met Lin Jie's seemingly intense gaze. His

plan to uncover the bookstore owner's opinion had been completely seen through... No, he should have been prepared for this.

The outcome of the battle depended entirely on who this demon wanted to win.

He wanted to try getting an answer for the bookstore owner because he was at the demon's mercy. However, the demon had thrown the question back at him. Clearly, the ensuing dialogue would be based on this.

In other words, every word Greg said might determine the direction of the battle...

"I, I..." With this realization, cold sweat started to break out on Greg's forehead once again.

Monster, this monster!

Of course, what Greg wanted and what he hoped was for Joseph to win!

But... What if, after expressing my view, this demon deliberately plays the devil's advocate and says that he reckons Wilde would win just to toy with me?

Then, can I say that Wilde would win? But what if he goes along with me and really lets Wilde win?! Am I going to say that Wilde would win?

Regardless of whichever answer, it's all completely in his control. I completely have no say!

The panicking Greg kept rubbing his palms together in regret. He shouldn't have asked... Why did he try to act smart and take matters into his own hands...

Lin Jie noticed Greg's nervousness and wondered if he had made a wrong assumption. Could Joseph's disciple have a different view?

Oh... Maybe that's why he feels so torn up inside?

The understanding Boss Lin smiled and pushed a teacup over.

“Don’t be afraid. Just say whatever is on your mind. Just like we mentioned, treat me as a tree hollow. Whatever you want to discuss is merely a hypothesis. It’s not like we are really gonna let those two fight to the death, right? Don’t worry. Nothing will happen.”

Something’s definitely going to happen! This is surely his revenge for my attempt to test him! Greg howled on the inside. With a trembling voice, he could only utter, “I...I think...”

Lin Jie gazed at the youngster patiently and inched the teacup closer to Greg. “What do you think? How about some tea to calm yourself down?”

Greg felt that the teacup was his lifeline. The pressure building was getting more intense by the second.

Lin Jie sighed. “Actually, the two of them have quite a good relationship. Otherwise, Joseph wouldn’t have spent two years looking for Wilde. Although they had some conflicts in the past, I could tell that they both knew each other very well, just that they were unwilling to say it aloud. Had they met, the two might be able to reminisce and relive the past. After all, they were thick friends. If they were to meet each other again, I’m sure they can definitely understand how each other felt...”

Gulp...

The youngster swallowed. *Could it... could it be that Sir Joseph is actually fighting with Wilde at present? Back then, Sir Joseph had nearly shattered Wilde to pieces in their previous fight. Wouldn’t “understand how each other felt” mean...*

He gritted his teeth and shut his eyes. With a trembling hand, he picked up the teacup and took a big gulp. “I think...”

Beep beep—

Greg was interrupted by the buzz of the communications device he’d put away.

Greg felt frustration and anger well up as his eyes shot open. And just as he considered just hanging up, he noticed the displayed

name read ‘Winston.’

Combat Division’s Chief? Damn it, of all times, why did he have to call now?!

As per Secret Rite Tower regulations, in any situation, unless one’s movements were restricted, subordinates could not voluntarily hang up when contacted by their superiors.

Although Greg and Winston were from different divisions, the youngster was still considered a subordinate. Moreover, Winston didn’t seem to be on good terms with Joseph as of late, so there would definitely be future trouble if Greg chose to leave the call...

No, no, no. If I don’t deal with things properly now and something were to happen to Sir Joseph, there wouldn’t even be a future to consider!

Noticing the conflicted look on Greg’s face, the kind and understanding Boss Lin put down his own cup and said, “It’s alright. Pick up the call first. Take more time to think about it and you’ll have a more objective answer.”

Chapter 341: Could This All Have Been Part Of His Plan?

Ha, seems like young Greg shall be the one troubled by the tough question he posed to me. Looks like it's your problem now... Without batting an eyelid, Lin Jie smiled at the youngster who had answered the call and was whispering into his communications device.

Want to fight me? You're still too young for that, kid.

It was difficult to describe Greg's current mood. He could only take a deep breath and suppress the anger and anxiety welling up. Trying his best to calm himself down, he picked up the call from Winston, chief of the Combat Division. "Hello..."

However, he never imagined that Winston on the other end of the call was even more anxious than him. Winston, who had always been known for his stable calmness, seemed to be growling. "Apprentice Knight Greg, can you confirm that you're attending Ji Zhixiu's birthday banquet at A16 Manor?"

"Yes," Greg replied immediately. "As the Intelligence Division currently doesn't have any missions, my family asked me to attend Rolle Resources' banquet as a representative."

That had also been the reason why he had been complaining to his father via the communications device.

As Secret Rite Tower and the Corpse Devouring Sect had already begun fighting, the Intelligence Division was of little use at this time. Basically, most of the intelligence had been collected before the fighting began and the Intelligence Division personnel weren't strong enough to fight on the battlefield.

Many others were temporarily transferred to the Logistics Division, which was under immense pressure, or were left idle like Greg.

Therefore, the reason he had been sent by his family to such a

boring and luxurious banquet hosted by a mortal was to pass time...

"I didn't ask you why!" Winston interrupted. "You've now been assigned a mission. An urgent one directly issued by the Council of Elders.

"Listen carefully." Winston's tone was very serious. "At this moment, the subject of S-rank file 0113, who is suspected to be above Supreme-rank, the owner of the nameless bookstore named Lin Jie, got through the Tower's surveillance net three hours ago and is attending this banquet at A16 Manor.

"And now, due to the fighting between the Tower and the Corpse Devouring Sect, almost all personnel have been dispatched to the battlefield. At present, you are the only Tower personnel at A16 Manor.

"Therefore, only you can continue to monitor him. Do you understand? In short, your next task is to find him, secretly monitor his movements, and report in real time. If necessary, you can interact to a certain extent, but you need to get approval from the Tower and cautiously under guidance. You must not act rashly, do you understand?"

Greg was at a loss for words as he glanced at Lin Jie sipping tea directly opposite him.

On the other end of the call, Winston frowned when he noticed the lasting silence. He called out sternly, "What's the matter, Apprentice Knight Greg? Please respond immediately. I repeat, your mission is to locate the bookstore owner at the banquet and monitor him.

"From your file, it's recorded that you've come across the bookstore owner before and should have no issues identifying him based on appearance. You are also previously an investigator from the Logistics Division, so it shouldn't be too difficult to locate the target. However, you just have to ensure you conceal yourself properly.

"This mission is of utmost importance and dangerous as it could decide the fate of your teacher, Joseph. Please take this seriously.

The Tower will assist you as much as possible if necessary. Do you understand?

“If you read, please comply and respond at once.”

Greg uttered, “I understand, but—”

Winston cut him off coldly, “But? Apprentice Knight, you have no right to comment. This is a mandatory mission. Please think about your family first if you are intending to refuse. Even a long-standing magician family is still insignificant in the face of Secret Rite Tower.”

Winston could understand how terrified the person being given this mission would be. Facing pressure of an existence that was beyond Supreme-rank was no different from staring into an abyss with the shadow of death hanging over the shoulder. However, this was a gamble that Secret Rite Tower had no choice but to take.

“No, I have no intention to refuse. In fact, I’m happy to oblige. It’s just that there’s a situation I have to report...” Greg paused, composed himself, cleared his throat, and tried to speak as calmly as he could, “Actually, he’s sitting right across from me.”

“...”

“...”

There was a few seconds of silence followed by Winston taking a deep breath. “Across you?”

“Mmm,” answered Greg.

“How close?” asked Winston.

Greg covertly eyed Lin Jie, who seemed to be appraising the decorations in the room. Tactfully, he whispered into the communications device. “Uh... Across the table.”

Wouldn't this mean that they have already met?!

Winston’s eyes nearly popped out of their sockets. Even his many

experiences on the battlefield never made his heart pound as much as it did now.

It had taken them close to a half day's careful planning before they dared to contact the only Secret Rite Tower personnel at the banquet, only to be told that the final boss was already knocking on the door.

Calm down, calm down.

Winston took deep breaths. Since the bookstore owner was already in front of Greg, it meant that... their actions had been seen through.

Moreover, Greg had been the only contactable Secret Rite Tower personnel in the entire banquet's attendance.

Could this all have been part of his plan as well?

From steering Joseph and Wilde on a collision course, the beginning of the battle between Secret Rite Tower and the Corpse Devouring Sect, to his unexpected appearance at the banquet. Every step, up till this moment, seemed interconnected and arranged to precision.

Was this his rumored 'omniscience and omnipotence' at work... Since this was the case, Winston could only brace himself for what was to come and proceed on.

At the very last moment, Winston changed and said, "Listen up, Apprentice Knight. Joseph and Wilde have already clashed and the situation isn't looking good. Joseph's daughter, Melissa, was deceived by someone under the control of the Path of the Flaming Sword and made to join the siege mission on the Corpse Devouring Sect. While her life isn't in any danger right now, she's equivalent to being a hostage. Joseph... is already at a disadvantage.

"That deep hatred Wilde has from the battle two years ago is even more intense now. After so many years, his cruelty and cunning is far greater than before. Joseph has ties with many others, but to Wilde, everyone is just but a tool. Therefore, we need to seek for other means of a breakthrough."

Greg tightened his grip on the communications device, his heart sinking when he recalled Lin Jie's almost explicit words just now. *Sure enough...*

But regardless of how strong Wilde is, isn't he only Destructive-rank? Secret Rite Tower was an organization that could deal with Supreme-ranks. Didn't they move to provide support?

As if reading Greg's mind, Winston said, "Regrettably, Secret Rite Tower can no longer deal with it anymore. While it sounds unbelievable... roughly ten minutes ago, and a few minutes before I decided to contact you, we had been monitoring the center of the battlefield when—

"Two Supreme-rank fluctuations appeared."

Chapter 342: Battlefield

67th Avenue had already been reduced to ruins.

Snowflakes fluttered in the sky above the battlefield, but not a single one successfully touched the ground as they were sucked up and evaporated by the large quantities of invisible aether, turning into huge swirling vortexes of water vapor.

The entire street, along with the surrounding buildings, was completely destroyed.

Fragments and broken bits were lifted and carried off by an invisible force, causing them to be suspended in midair, forming revolving streams of metal surrounding two apparent force fields; one white and one black.

From above, it was as if this was all a small planet surrounded by an asteroid belt, still expanding, crushing, and shattering the surrounding ground.

The reason for the current situation was a rather simple one.

Joseph and Wilde both had a simultaneous breakthrough to Supreme-rank during the battle, triggering the eruption and rapid collision of the surrounding aether.

Personnel from Secret Rite Tower's Logistics Division were scattered around the fringes force-field, leaving enough distance to consolidate the Dream Creator's enchantment so as to prevent ordinary folk from entering by mistake.

Meanwhile, knights of the Combat Division had taken up positions on terrain that were still intact. Most were either injured, healing, or resting. They could only stare at the gigantic force-field blankly and the overall morale was very low.

From the moment the explosion of aether was detected in the center of the battlefield, they were no longer the decisive force of this war.

Still, they would still have to fight the remaining members of the Corpse Devouring Sect.

However, in reality, among those that remained, there weren't many that could continue fighting.

When two Destructive-rank beings leveled up to Supreme-rank at the same time and clashed against each other with their fullest might, not many could stay alive to witness it. In fact, less than ten percent of those present at that time were still living.

As for those that failed to evacuate in time... They had already been crushed into powder and floated around with the surrounding dust within the force-field.

It's over. It's all fucking over. That was Winston's first thought when he heard the Logistics Division's energy report that the concentration was rising rapidly and that two cores had appeared in the center of the battlefield.

Regardless of how calm this chief of the Combat Division was known to be, he still had the urge to cuss.

At present, it had been nearly three hours since Joseph heard the news that his daughter was trapped on the battlefield, thus breaking out of Secret Rite Tower and rushing to the scene. In the meantime, Secret Rite Tower's main forces had also arrived there.

The center of the battlefield was covered by the Dream Creator's enchantment, and that isolated the outside world from receiving information of everything that went on within. Only those inside could know how intense the battle was.

Naturally, as the chief of the Combat Division, Winston ought to be on site. But at the same time, he still needed to maintain command of the overall situation.

However, even he would have no way of getting close to the center of the battle, nor interfere in any way. Thus, he could only inform Secret Rite Tower's Council of Elders and have them make the decisions.

After all, Destructive-ranks weren't just for show. A single one possessed power to cause massive destruction.

The only fortunate thing was that Melissa had been saved... No, putting it more accurately, she had been fine to begin with and had even slain three Pandemonium-rank members of the Corpse Devouring Sect.

The problem was that Corpse Devouring Sect members were being replaced at a rate that was far too quick. By relying on blood sacrifices to rapidly increase their strength, they could even use the lives of their compatriots as a basis.

In other words, the more Corpse Devouring Sect followers were slain, the stronger their remaining members got and the more people were sacrificed. This was simply a situation that seemed impossible to solve.

Although Melissa was fine, the squad that had carried out this mission was thoroughly decimated. Captain Vivian had also met an unfortunate death when another of Wilde's followers arrived and took her down with a despicable team up with Night Falcon.

The young Melissa had never experienced such a cruel situation. Before she could even rejoice the slaying of three evil-doers with her newfound power, her smile froze on her face.

If not for Winston arriving in time to pull her out, Melissa, who had been rooted to the spot, would have been crushed by the force field.

Currently, the young lady sat at the side with a blank look in her eyes, just like so many other Combat Division personnel. No one could easily accept the sudden deaths of comrades that had been talking with them just a short while ago. No matter how experienced a knight they might be, anyone would still be at a momentary loss in the face of such huge casualties.

It wasn't limited to just the knights of Secret Rite Tower; many Corpse Devouring Sect members had also suffered the same fate.

However, the difference was that the Corpse Devouring Sect

members torn into pieces by the invisible aether were directly absorbed by the chaotic black force field of aether produced by Wilde, adding a terrifying shade of blood to it, just like squirming blood vessels.

Evidently, during Wilde's ascension, he had been using the Corpse Devouring Sects iconic blood sacrifices and turning those followers into nourishment for himself.

Those believers themselves had practiced their own blood sacrifices to increase their own strength countless times and now all of this power was absorbed by Wilde.

Blood sacrifices upon blood sacrifices... Wilde had basically built these devotees up as nourishment, using them, manipulating them, and finally consuming them. This black magician, whose cruelty and cold-bloodedness was well known, had displayed such an extreme level of efficiency.

These believers that had been brought to the battlefield by him as sacrificial offerings were tools and stepping stones for him to get even stronger.

"The current situation is really bad..." Winston gazed in the distance at the two aetheric force fields trying to engulf the other. One looked like the sky illuminated by blazing white flames, while the other was more like a coagulated lump for black flesh like a squirming heart. The Combat Division chief uttered into the communications device, "Wilde is too well-prepared and has had this planned out for a long time already. Moreover, his strength is constantly increasing by the minute. Although Joseph...appears to have the upper hand for now, Wilde is getting scarier as this goes on."

Greg couldn't believe it. He looked out of the room's windows at the quiet, dark snow night and felt his skin crawl as he observed the beautiful snowflakes falling gently.

It turned out that the earthquake and lightning from before were actually the aftermath from a clash of two Supreme-ranks.

How far was the Central District from 67th Avenue? Nearly half of Norzin laid between the two.

Even so, Greg had felt that obvious tremor, so it was unimaginable how dangerous the epicenter of the battle was.

Yet, this group of ignorant mortals were still drinking and making merry, talking about a tomorrow that might not even exist!

Greg suddenly grasped a blind spot and quickly asked, “Isn’t the Tower planning to stop them? Why did you come looking for—” He stopped himself mid-sentence, having nearly said, “this demon for help”.

With a shake of his head, Winston replied, “Apprentice Knight, the Council of Elders only assigned this mission to you and only you. Since you’ve already made contact with the bookstore owner, then we just have to find out what he’s thinking. Get it done as soon as possible. We will have to act accordingly to the information you obtain.”

But there’s a critical situation going on, and shouldn’t the first priority be stopping the fight between Supreme-ranks?

The Tower clearly has that ability, yet they want me here to find out what this demon’s thoughts are! They are simply treating Joseph and countless citizens as tools to probe further!

How is this any different from Wilde’s actions?

What are they trying to do?!

Countless thoughts ran through Greg’s mind, yet he stifled them, not daring to voice out till his face turned red.

Chapter 343: Humans Die When Killed

“Apprentice Knight, we don’t have much time.” After a few seconds, when Greg had fallen silent, Winston uttered, “I know what’s going through your mind, but our only duty is to follow others. The Council of Elders have a longer-term and comprehensive plan... When carrying out a mission, we cannot be slaves to our own emotions or they would only result in even more unpredictable consequences.

“I’m only reminding you this once since you’re Joseph’s disciple. Joseph has a personality that is too straightforward... We started off in the Training Division since we were both young, and it’s not an exaggeration to say that I know him best. He’s indeed the fearless and indomitable white flame that we all revere, both before till now.

“However, this impression you have is based on the countless times he disobeyed the Tower’s orders and made his own choice in missions.”

Greg was taken aback and instinctively retorted, “Those are all—”

Winston cut him off, “Perhaps you think that it’s a good decision? Because it appeared to have a happy ending each time? Heh, have you ever seen Joseph on the verge of dying... It might sound cruel, but that’s the truth that I’ve witnessed countless times.

“When battling alongside him, he would always go against the Council of Elder’s arrangements. Evidently, by keeping to the plan, matters would definitely be resolved with the least possible consequences. Yet, Joseph doesn’t even allow this little consequence. It might appear cool for him to bear everything on himself, but witnessing it firsthand just once would allow anyone understand how heavy the toll is.

“If not for his strength and the impossible luck he has... He would

have perished on the battlefield a long time ago, and the name of 'Indomitable Sacred Flame' would never come to be."

Greg really wanted to go on refuting—they revered Joseph, who was given such a name precisely because he would go against the odds countless times and save everyone despite being on the brink of death.

However, whatever words Greg had got stuck in his throat. The young man realized that this wasn't Joseph's enemy discrediting him but a confession from a friend.

Winston hadn't said all these to imply that Joseph had relied on luck to achieve his current achievements, nor that his subsequent depravity was a manifestation of his own incompetence...

What he wanted to say was that Joseph wasn't as glorious and perfect as those that revered him assumed. Joseph wasn't an invincible hero from a fairy-tale, just a powerful and somewhat willful human.

Or rather, Winston wanted to say that Joseph was only human too.

And as long as he was human, he could... die.

Greg couldn't help recalling that rainy night where he witnessed Joseph's seemingly infallible body collapse without any warning in front of the bookstore owner.

"Some things don't develop the way you hope they do. You and me, we aren't Joseph, and we can never be. The Tower's orders are the core of our operation. If you want to be a second Joseph, how are you going to face the possibility of losing everyone around you if you make a mistake?

"In this world full of holes that could be breached by the dream realm at any moment, fate will not allow you to fail even once." Winston felt somehow disheartened and frustrated as he spoke. Glancing up, he observed the expanding force fields that were brewing an aether storm in the center.

From past information, battles between Supreme-ranks wouldn't

persist for too long, but they wouldn't be too short either. A battle could last for as short as a few hours or as long as a few days or even moments. However, such a short period of time was enough to cause unimaginable disaster, especially since the two going at it now were mortal enemies.

Moreover, it had always been outside of Norzin in the past, but the current battle was happening within the city...

This apparent deadlocked situation was most definitely the result of a certain hot-tempered jerk trying his hardest to hold Wilde back.

Just like many times in the past...

It wouldn't be long before this battle came to an end, regardless of whether Greg completed his mission or whatever decision Secret Rite Tower chose to make.

The one stepping out of the ruins would be the final victor of this chase that had spanned two years.

Winston pulled his gaze away. "...Sometimes, it is inevitable for there to be necessary sacrifices."

But are these sacrifices really necessary? Greg couldn't help but wonder. However, he knew that there was no point in arguing now, thus he nodded and said, "I understand. I'll do my best."

Winston gave his parting words, "Good that you do. Apprentice Knight Greg, keep in touch and report back from time to time. All that you will be doing now is for the sake of Norzin."

That being said, Greg didn't know how he was supposed to sound the bookstore owner out... It was more appropriate to say that he had just tried it and failed.

And now the demon across him was still waiting for Greg's answer.

Although he was told to report back whenever possible, he hadn't dared to ask how he should have proceeded when he was right in front of Lin Jie.

In the end, didn't he still have to rely on himself?

Greg couldn't help but experience the possibility that a single mistake on his part could get everyone around him killed. So... This was the kind of pressure Sir Joseph faced all the time?

He took a deep breath and put down his communications device, then glanced across and met Lin Jie's gaze.

Boss Lin looked at him and asked, "That call... I mean, this comms, was it related to Joseph and me?"

You're asking the obvious! Greg roared inwardly but only nodded. He tried to find the right words and decided he couldn't be that directly anymore. "It's a friend of Sir Joseph's. He was asking about how you helped Joseph in the past as well as mention about the mission being undertaken by Sir Joseph now."

"I see... Those are just some insignificant contributions not worth remembering till now." Lin Jie waved his hand modestly. "You should have an answer to the previous question as well, right?"

Greg looked up, balling his hands into fists to encourage himself. "I think—Sir Joseph would win!"

Yes, he couldn't betray what he hoped for. Even if he had thought of ten thousand possibilities, he could only say this—Joseph would definitely win.

"Oh..." Lin Jie understood. Greg had chosen Joseph in the end after hesitating for so long. While it was clear that the youngster had confidence in Joseph, the time taken to ponder over it meant that he must have a high evaluation of Wilde as well.

He must have certainly considered the possibility of Wilde coming out on top.

Greg was very apprehensive, his heart pounding as he rubbed his hands together nervously. "This... This is my own personal opinion. What... what do you think?"

Of course, Lin Jie agreed readily. "I think so too."

“?...!!!”

Greg was first stunned, then ecstatic, nearly jumping up from excitement. He was buzzing and felt like he was going to faint.

Trembling, he braced himself against the table. “R-really? Do you really think... Sir Joseph would win?”

“Of course.” Lin Jie had always been accommodating to the wishes of customers. “While Wilde is better at planning, Joseph has a much stronger execution. More importantly, he has many that support him like yourself, am I right?”

“Even if there are twists and turns in the process, I believe the result would come good.”

Chapter 344: Entering Dream

Greg's hands were trembling, and his heart racing. Even though he wanted to elatedly turn on his communications device and tell Winston the great news, his intuition suddenly made him vigilant.

After several previous scares, Greg would no longer believe the words of this manipulative demon that easily. He was aware that he would only continue to be tricked by this guy if he kept it up.

Therefore, he had also picked up on the words 'process' and 'twisted.'

Greg took a deep breath trying to suppress the excitement in his heart. With a quivering voice, he tried his best to sound as calm as possible. "Yes, I once heard an old saying; a just cause attracts more support, an unjust one finds little. Wilde's biggest failure is that he's a cold and cruel loner that acts on his own whims. However, Sir Joseph is different. Everything he does is to safeguard Norzin and to protect the weak!"

Greg clenched his fists as he spoke, "Those he protects with all his might will naturally repay him one day. I've always believed that, so... so I followed him. No matter when, even if he falls to the lowest depths, I want him to know that we've always been grateful and supported him!

"All his efforts were worth it! We have never forgotten about him!"

His speech was impassioned, like a fanatical fan going on a fervent rant. Lin Jie raised his hand and applauded lightly.

At the same time, he couldn't help comparing Greg to John, who had gone on a rambling tirade just now. They both were indeed young sons of noble families and had an eloquence when it came to words.

However, John, who was probably finished now, clearly didn't use those skills in the right way.

Greg felt dizzy after he was done, realizing that he had already stood up rather unsteadily. He immediately gave an awkward smile and sat back down, cleared his throat and said sheepishly, “In any case... What you said is totally right. But what were you referring to by saying... twists and turns?”

I'm not a fortune-teller. How would I know what would happen if the two of them really fought?!

The dissension between Joseph and Wilde had lasted for so many years already that it was impossible to smile and put an end to their grudges as soon as they met. If the two fought, things would definitely get messy.

‘Twist and turns’ was just to give himself a way out... If the two really fought and Wilde came out on top, it would be considered part of the ‘twists and turns.’

It made sense.

However, why did Wilde have the image of a ‘cold and cruel’ villain in the eyes of those in Joseph’s camp?

...A skinny old crippled empty nester like Wilde who spends all his time absorbed in academic research really didn't seem coherent with those two words, but well, perception is shaped by belief, huh.

It seems that the enmity between these two people are really deep-rooted!

Lin Jie solemnly folded his arms and rubbed his chin as he continued slowly, “While Joseph has supporters like you and has a much better execution, Wilde is better at planning...”

...?

Question marks popped up in Greg’s head. Why did these words sound so familiar? Hadn’t he heard it just a few minutes ago but in a slightly different order?

Lin Jie glanced at Greg with a skeptical look on his face. “Isn’t that so? Feel free to air your views if you have any other thoughts...”

“Uh-huh! That’s right! You’re absolutely right! I don’t have any other thoughts! None at all!” Greg nodded frantically.

Lin Jie continued on with a smile, “After all, with all of Joseph’s ability, it still took him two years to find Wilde. Hence it can be seen that if Wilde is well prepared, Joseph might very well be led around by the nose. Moreover, as his best friend, Wilde knows him very well, so Joseph’s chances of victory wouldn’t be too high, and there would definitely be some twists and turns.

“But as you said, Wilde is a loner after all...” At this point Lin Jie paused abruptly, then added, “Actually, Old Wil isn’t alone anymore. He actually brought along a few new students previously and wanted me to help guide them along. I wonder how their studies are faring now.”

Of course, Greg knew who those few were—the mainstay of the Corpse Devouring Sect who were now warring against Secret Rite Tower at the heart of the battlefield.

“Speaking of which, your relationship with Joseph is quite similar to the sort they have with Wilde.” Lin Jie chuckled. “They, too, admire Wilde greatly.”

Greg wasn’t pleased when he heard this and immediately rebutted with a straight face, “They’re helping the wicked! That’s fundamentally different from me!”

“Yes, yes, yes...” Lin Jie nodded perfunctorily as he stroked his chin while musing, “I’m really interested to see what would happen if you guys met.”

?? Greg’s eyes widened. The original excitement on his face quickly faded and his expression turned sour.

“Haha, I was just joking. Don’t get so worked up.” Lin Jie shrugged. “Though I really want to talk with you more about your troubles, it’s getting rather late now.”

Glancing out the window and seeing that it was already completely dark, Lin Jie said, “There’s still the banquet tomorrow. Let’s end our

pleasant conversation here for now.”

Greg felt as if he had been pardoned and stumbled out of the room with the communications device as Lin Jie watched him go. Before leaving, Greg didn't forget to wish the bookstore owner a good night.

Lin Jie smiled and waved his hand, watching the figure gradually disappear into the narrow crack of the door.

“Phew...” After returning to his room and shutting the door, Greg leaned against the wall and exhaled sharply. He rubbed his forehead, realizing that it was full of cold sweat. His tense body finally went limp and he almost slid to the ground.

“Now isn't the time to relax yet!” Greg gritted his teeth and took out his communications device to report the situation.

When Winston heard the report, he fell silent for a while. Then, trying his best to stop his voice from trembling, he asked, “Are you certain, Apprentice Knight?”

Greg nodded vigorously. “I'm certain! It's what that evil demo—bookstore owner said so himself!”

“In that case, I will report it to the Council of Elders,” Winston expressed heavily. “But... I'm afraid you have to be prepared... Apprentice Knight.”

Greg was momentarily stumped. Then, he overheard the alien sounds from the other end of the communications device. It sounded like the sound of horrifying squirming together with the roaring of wind, or rather, like the sound of an enormous monster breathing.

When piecing it together, it sounded as if something... was swallowing and chewing.

“That demon might have lied to you,” finished Winston.

The distinction of black and white in the center of the ruins was no longer that discernible as before.

From the black half, countless tentacles mixed with bloody threads extended out from the center, gradually covering the entire battlefield and engulfing everything, both living and dead.

Even the white flames of the other half were gradually dissipating.

The ominous black tide was crushing everything around it with an unstoppable momentum.

Lin Jie hummed as he finished washing up and changing into his pajamas. After thinking for a bit, he took out his dream-catcher and hung it on the wall above him. Then, he laid down on the soft bed, closed his eyes and entered his long awaited white and silvery dream-scape.

Chapter 345: I Killed Someone Today

“Come to think of it... It’s been a while since I last saw Silver.” Standing in the familiar field of irises, gazing at the tower tree, Lin Jie rubbed the ring on his finger and muttered to himself.

It wasn’t that he didn’t wish to have pleasant chats with a beautiful member of the fairer sex everyday, but Lin Jie had many more things to do in recent times than before, especially with the management and operations of the book cafe.

While it seemed like he had been slacking, Mu’en had to learn everything from scratch. She could use common sense or pick up simple skills very quickly, but for complicated business operations like ‘running a book cafe’, Mu’en had to understand the relevant knowledge first, then spend more time to understand it.

Currently, Mu’en was more used to following orders and carrying them out meticulously. If she was let to do things on her own, Mu’en would spend a long time at a loss... Thus, Lin Jie had to make the arrangements himself.

With things to do in the day, he wanted to sleep normally at night.

Well, that wasn’t actually the main reason either.

The real reason was that Silver had been away a lot recently...

That’s right. Lin Jie hadn’t been able to find Silver at all after he re-entered this dream realm later on and could only stare blankly at the irises and falling snow for consecutive days.

After a couple more times, Lin Jie was no longer that obsessed with chatting with her every night.

This was clearly Silver’s dream, but he often couldn’t often see her in person, which puzzled Lin Jie.

However, every time Silver reappeared and Lin Jie tried to ask about it, the former would always reveal a sly smile and put a finger to her lips, saying things like “it’s a secret”, “you’ll know in time”, and “It wouldn’t be a surprise if I speak about it in advance”.

So be it... Lin Jie pursed his lips. He was somewhat tired of this tantalizing mystery.

However, even if he knew that it was all done on purpose, he didn’t choose to get to the bottom of it.

After all, if it were a man teasing him like this, the process might be sort of disgusting and Lin Jie would definitely want a stop to it immediately. But when it was a cute lady teasing him in this manner, it couldn’t be considered stupid. More like... fun.

In short, the combination of these two reasons resulted in Lin Jie seeing little of Silver during this period of time.

Lin Jie strolled over to the spot under the tree. As expected, it was still empty.

Only the bench he had created previously still stood amongst the flowers. It had been kept since then, but it was littered with petals, having not been used by anyone for quite some time.

Lin Jie reached out and patted off the petals and snow on the bench before taking a seat. Then, he took out the journal from Earth as well as the information about the Lower District that Andrew had provided.

These days, even if he could not see Silver, he would still come into this dream realm to admire the scenery while doing some of his own stuff.

Thanks to Andrew, Lin Jie had quite a decent understanding of Norzin’s Lower District.

Compared to the notebook, many doubts he had about that place were all solved.

Andrew seems to like the cafe’s pearl milk tea and has bought quite a bit

for takeaways. I should give him a few free cups the next time he visits...
With that thought in mind, Lin Jie went through a final round of sorting out his notes.

The most important points in the journal were the words and structural drawings drawn by the owner, as well as the ‘gate’ that was described.

After Lin Jie made a careful comparison, he confirmed that the copied drawings matched the architectural style of buildings excavated in the Lower Distract ruins.

Most of the misshapen text uncovered was in the language of the Elven Kingdom of Alford from the Second Era, but it wasn’t the orthodox Elven language that Lin Jie had gained from Candela.

And after changes over time, this became the language used by some vestigial clans after the destruction of Alford.

According to information provided by Andrew—or more aptly put, myths—after losing the protection of the last Elven King, Candela, during the period without light and fire, those vestigial clans split into several branches.

The largest of them kept on defending the capital, but their territory shrank endlessly under the invasion of the darkness and eventually fell.

The entire imperial capital turned into ruins and became a nest where the darkness grew.

Those characters written in the journal... were also what the journal’s owner had written down when he claimed to be ‘overflowing with inspiration’ and were all characters in the language of the vestigial clans.

Therefore, it could be concluded that the archaeological team led by Professor Lin was mostly in the ruins of the royal capital of the ancient Alford Kingdom. Also, the unknown monster that attacked them and caused them all sorts of confusion was probably the ‘darkness’ that the elves mentioned.

The gate they found was probably the entrance to this royal capital, but for some reason this gate actually connected Earth and Azir...

Surely there's some sort of trigger... The archaeological project existed for only a few months, and the whole ruins seemed to be fixed there. It's not a simple overlap of time and space, is it?

Lin Jie clasped his chin and shook his head, feeling that it was a pity. Had he still been on Earth, investigating it would be easy. However, he was on the other side of the gate now, and that would be difficult to find.

Fortunately, the Truth Union had control of the Upper District's entrance to the Lower District, and it was the organization in Norzin that knew the most about that area. With Lin Jie's current relationship with Andrew, perhaps it wouldn't be a problem for him to enter the Lower District. However, he would have to rely on himself if he wanted to find the ruins.

Andrew also gave him a detailed map of the Lower District. However, it was only limited to the safe area for human activity there. The ruins were in unexplored regions thus far, which was why there were many explorers and scholars approved by the Truth Union there to investigate.

And this journal was probably brought up to the Upper District because of this.

"Alright, when Mu'en can properly take over the bookstore, I'll be able to head to the Lower District to search for clues related to this journal..." Lin Jie put away his notes, stretched, and sighed.

He leaned back and observed this beautiful, empty white world.

Incidentally, this was the first time he had stayed for so long in this Silver-less dream realm for so long.

Lin Jie couldn't help but imagine how Silver had stayed under this tree day after day, year after year, watching this eternal scenery and wandering around this flowerbed in a daze before he had come...

It was really lonely indeed.

For her, having this friend in Lin Jie seemed to be the only difference in color to this entire world.

The corners of Lin Jie's lips curled upward as he adjusted his posture and closed his eyes to rest on the bench.

Just as she was about to fall asleep, he felt a tinge of coldness on his forehead.

Snow? Lin Jie opened his eyes in slight bewilderment. Cold and slender fingers were covering his eyes as a familiar voice sounded from behind him. "It's been awhile."

Lin Jie smiled and whispered, "I killed someone today."

Chapter 346: No Secular Desire

Lin Jie had no doubt about who those hands belonged to.

Besides Lin Jie, who didn't treat himself as an outsider and came in whenever he was free, the only other person that would appear in this dream was Silver, who was the owner of this dream realm.

Moreover, Lin Jie knew this voice very well. He smiled but didn't remove the hands covering his vision. Instead, he closed his eyes and leaned back.

As he had expected, the back of his head touched a soft and slightly cold body. This familiar friend was hugging him from behind for Lin Jie to lean on. Due to her height, she even considerably adjusted the angle for him to lean more comfortably.

By logic, such intimate contact already far exceeded the boundaries of a 'friend'.

However, perhaps due to this being a dream realm, there wasn't any secular etiquette. There was no need to overthink on how to interact and get along. Simply following the intimate actions of whatever one felt deep down seemed natural and ordinary.

Similarly, when he was here, Lin Jie often felt that he had no secular desires or worries.

Without any restrictions, naturally, he could speak freely.

Compared to Lin Jie and Greg, Silver was evidently more suitable at being a 'tree hollow'.

After all, dreams were just dreams and would never affect reality... right?

Silver smiled and did not show any surprise despite Lin Jie saying such a scary thing out of the blue. She whispered in his ear, "Was it just one person?"

She rested her chin on Lin Jie's shoulder and said faintly, "The Fred Clan... Other than the year-old Fitz Fred, who knew nothing, and the servant who was deliberately released to make a report. The other servants and guards, even a five-year-old child who witnessed everything did not survive.

"Hmm... Let me count. A total of 376 people." Silver's voice was as gentle as ever as she raised her head slightly. "In your opinion, did you kill only one person?"

Lin Jie's eyes were covered, but his expression did not change. He said firmly, "I only killed John Fred.

"In fact, it can't really be considered killing." Lin Jie shrugged nonchalantly. "Since he wanted to categorize people, I just earnestly told him the simplest way. However, I have to admit that what he said makes sense. There is indeed an insurmountable gap between humans and livestock.

"Beasts would only bite and claw when they kill, giving their prey a most primitive and barbaric death. However, humans can kill without blood-shed..."

Silver cocked her head. "So, the other 375 were just your killing tools that were sacrificed on the altar to prove your point?"

Lin Jie was rather amused with this way of phrasing. "I'm not some god that can respond to wishes. Nothing would be provided even if sacrifices are offered to me... I merely wanted to see the look on that guy's face as all that he has comes crashing down.

"Everything he's proud of was brought about by innumerable sins. I want him to know that the arrogance built on the lives of others is just a weak self-deception. He himself is actually just a pitiful worm that thinks of the leaf he is on as his most powerful weapon."

Slightly lowering his voice, Lin Jie continued to mutter, "Having power makes one arrogant, be it authority or force... Although I didn't hesitate much today and don't have any regrets, John's death is actually a wake-up call for me.

“As for the others...” Lin Jie shrugged. “I didn’t kill them.”

Silver’s eyes narrowed and her expression became a peculiar one. “Wasn’t it your...” She then paused abruptly, then said begrudgingly, “Well, it wasn’t you. I understand.”

Lin Jie couldn’t see the change in Silver’s expression, but he assumed that his dream friend must have understood that he didn’t want to reveal Blackie’s existence, so she had adjusted her words accordingly.

She is still the same gentle Silver... Choosing to confide in her is the best choice indeed.

With that, the last bit of worry in Lin Jie’s heart disappeared. He was worried that the sudden mention of this matter would make him seem less reliable in Silver’s opinion.

But indeed, as long as he explained himself, Silver would understand him.

At this point, Lin Jie hesitated for a moment, then he reached out to touch Silver’s hand that was covering his eyes. The latter seemed to immediately understand his intentions, loosening her fingers, but had no intention of moving her hand away.

Thus, Lin Jie’s hand ended up over Silver’s hand and his smile widened. He coughed dryly to cover it up and asked, “Speaking of which, when will the ‘secret’ and ‘surprise’ you are always mentioning be ready?”

Silver tilted his head, seemingly rubbing the side of his face against Lin Jie’s ear, and said, “That... will be soon. My preparations are almost complete.”

With a hint of joy in her tone, Silver added with a chuckle, “I can reveal a bit in advance, consider it a gift. I’ve spent a long time preparing and I hope you’ll like it.”

“I definitely will.” Lin Jie replied decisively.

While he had yet to see the shadow of the gift, it didn’t stop Lin Jie

from saying it out of politeness.

Silver chuckled. “You’ve nearly mastered the sword techniques and spells that I taught you. So, according to our original agreement, I’ll tell you the truth about the transition during the Second and Third Era.

“In fact, you have probably learned quite a bit yourself. Candela and the whole of Alford’s weren’t facing an epidemic, but a certain existence from the darkness. ‘His’ overwhelming power and strength made those that saw or came into contact with ‘him’ mutate... However, Alford’s sins were far greater than that. Both cowardice... and greed. They tried to master the power of mutation, so they began experimenting.”

Lin Jie was taken aback. “Experimenting?” There were no records of this at all, and Candela’s memories were blotchy, as if deliberately avoiding it.

“Yes, experimenting,” said Silver. “They needed a large number of samples to find a way of controlling this power, but outstanding warriors were one in a hundred. How could they be used as consumables? So...”

Lin Jie’s eyes narrowed. “So the weak became lambs.”

It should be said that the truth of history was always shocking... How was this any different from the Fred Clan that Lin Jie had raided today?

Silver whispered softly, “But eventually, the power of the abyss grew out of control and many of Alford’s people were mutated. In the end, the last king failed to end the source of the mutation by killing the god and could only raise his sword against the subjects he had once protected.”

Lin Jie suddenly grasped what he had always missed. “So, Candela wasn’t crazy?”

Silver smiled and said, “Who knows...”

Chapter 347: Silver's Farewell

“Also... It doesn't matter whether he was crazy or sane. Now, no one would stand for that truth and no one would be willing to believe it. That period of history has long been reduced to ashes without even a chance to sugarcoat it.”

Lin Jie crossed his arms as he usually did and sighed. “The former kingdom and its people have long faded. Even Candela's soul has perished forever, leaving only a blurry memory. Regardless of the case, a king who slaughtered his own people and destroyed his country would always be viewed as a lunatic.”

When they had first met, Candela hadn't even bothered to refute and just directly acknowledged that he had gone insane and was the source of the so-called ‘Great Pestilence’.

It was probably because once the truth was revealed, the Ancient Elven Kingdom, which was a beautiful symbol in various myths and legends, would instantly crumble and appear as an evil, terrifying, weak, and selfish existence.

Presumably, Candela didn't want his kingdom to be viewed this way in the eyes of those that came after.

Unfortunately, since there wasn't any record of such a possibility in the resources provided by the Truth Union, this probably meant that... the vestigial clans that knew the truth hadn't defended Candela at all.

The sins of the kingdom's people were ultimately borne solely by their king.

Lin Jie couldn't help recalling how Candela had repeatedly emphasized that everything that happened was all because of his own sins.

Because of his arrogance, he had gone crazy looking at the gods. He was the one that slaughtered his people and the one who destroyed

Alfords. Therefore, he did not desire redemption, nor did he feel that he could atone for his sins. Instead, he was willing to endure endless torture.

But if he had never gone mad, what was it that had bound him, tortured him, and exiled his soul?

Perhaps... it was just the guilt he felt.

As the king of this kingdom, failing to protect this land and its people was his sin. Candela blamed it on his own incompetence and thus felt that the culprit and cause of everything had been himself.

Or perhaps, the memories of Candela, who was trapped in the sword for eons, had long faded. All that remained was eternal guilt and the words of the outside world that labeled him a sinner.

And eventually, even he believed that.

It must have really been utterly miserable...

Silver said in a hushed voice, “‘The Exile’, Candela, was trapped in the sacred sword that killed him because of his obsession—in fact, the one that exiled him was actually himself all along.”

Lin Jie silently summoned the sacred sword from his own dream realm and placed it across his knees. Brushing his fingers across the sharp blade, Lin Jie uttered, “But he was a good king.”

There wasn’t any reaction of the sacred soul. The resentment accumulated for tens of thousands of years had dissipated along with Candela’s soul back then. All that remained was an icy cold weapon that naturally wouldn’t respond at all.

However, the memories that Candela had once imparted to Lin Jie started to bubble at this moment. The second part of those memories that seemed to have always been shrouded by a dark fog suddenly became clear in an instant.

“Your Majesty, I’m sorry... There’s no other way! We just aren’t able to resist the darkness if it’s not like this! We are left with no choice...”

“The whole lot of you ought to die! How dare you all...”

“Would you rather watch Alford's be destroyed? Didn't you attempt to... The god in the depths of darkness is an existence that simply can't be stopped. Didn't you... fail too? Heh, or rather, even you can't see 'him'.”

“...”

“That's right. What we are doing is the only way we can save Alford's!”

“Your Majesty, you need to learn to choose. For the sake of survival, some sacrifices are necessary. We know how great your kindness and benevolence is, but... you see, they willingly became test subjects for Alford's. Their wishes were to contribute to the kingdom with their own strength.

“Are you going to let them down?”

“Enough... I'll delve deeper into the darkness again. Don't say another word.”

...

“My King, you're back...”

“All of you lied to me, why?”

“I'm sorry, ahem... Your Majesty, did you succeed?”

“...”

“It's okay, don't blame yourself. You've already done very well... Your Majesty, you are a great king... It's just that we aren't good subjects. Our apologies for having to let you see this embarrassing sight.”

“But given your mercy, you'll definitely listen to our last request.”

“—please kill us.”

...

"I am Candela, the last king of Alford. I am willing to pay any price to seek the protection of the Primordial Witches.

"Please protect my scattered people... and allow them to go on living."

"Very well."

Lin Jie's eyes were closed as he felt a burning sensation on the white ring-shaped mark on his wrist, causing him to subconsciously reach out and press down on that area of skin.

This mark was transformed from the crown that Candela had given to him in the dream. It was the symbol of the elf king.

The memories that gradually became clear helped him piece together that period of history.

So it was like this...

Lin Jie thought to himself. *I've misunderstood Candela's subjects. They were really at their wits end because it wasn't just the innocent folk that were affected, but the officials themselves too.*

He recalled the image in his memory of the huge, bloated monstrosities begging their king to kill when Candela returned to the imperial capital.

Come to think of it, they're the ones who actually went mad. Candela, who was sane from the beginning till the end, must have been in so much pain when he swung his sword to kill them.

The mark on Lin Jie's wrist gradually subsided, but the fluctuating emotions Candela had felt at the time he killed himself converged into a hint of doubt.

Protection of the Primordial Witches?

Yet, in Candela's memory what had descended before him wasn't witches in the usual sense... but for grotesque forms that were more

deformed and twisted than strange monsters.

Their voices seemed to be normal female ones, although there were some vague reverberations...

Lin Jie didn't know whether he was imagining things, but hadn't one of those voices sounded somewhat familiar?

Lin Jie's mind went to work, but he wasn't able to determine it right away. After all, voices that sounded alike were many, and it might just be that this one was a little similar.

Mm... In short, the price Candela had to pay was to never divulge the truth to his people so that the elves would completely become followers of the witches.

That had been his original intent, so he naturally agreed at once.

However, that eventually became tens of thousands of years of self-torture. *I wonder if he would have hesitated in hindsight?*

Silver suddenly interjected slyly, "Candela's Mark? This is the symbol of the Elf King, and he gave it to you willingly. In fact, it's equivalent to the handover of the throne. If you can find the elven survivors, they might be willing to honor you as King."

Lin Jie's lips twitched slightly. "Forget it. I'm just a bookstore owner. I can handle books, but can I manage people? I don't want to end up like Candela."

"I know you're lazy," was Silver's gentle reply. She paused for a bit before continuing, "I won't be showing up here for quite some time after this. You can use your own dream realm to devour this dream. That way, you can enter even without the dream-catcher."

Lin Jie was surprised. "Where are you going?"

"It's a secret~" answered Silver coyly.

Lin Jie: "..."

Silver smiled at Lin Jie and said, "But I promise I'll see you again

soon.”

Lin Jie still wanted to say more, but he felt the cold, soft touch on his forehead and was momentarily speechless.

Lin Jie opened his eyes, waking up from his dream.

The dream-catcher hanging above him turned into ashes as the faint rays of morning sun hit it, dissipating without a trace and leaving nothing behind.

Lin Jie smacked his lips as he recalled what he had dreamed. Then he froze. Didn't that voice seem to be really similar to Silver's?

Chapter 348: Confrontation

Although the daytime open-air banquet didn't start till eight on the second morning, Fitch woke up rather early.

After washing up, he stayed in his room and stood in front of the mirror practicing what to say when he saw Lin Jie later.

"Ahem... Good morning. Did you sleep well last night?

"No, no, that's way too unremarkable! Moreover, it's superfluous. As if an entity of such a level could suffer from poor sleep...

"Ahem, what a coincidence. Do you want to have breakfast together?

"I've already asked around. The breakfast venue is at the restaurant on the second floor of the west wing and it is also completely self-service. It can't be missed. Moreover, we would pass by some of the female guest rooms to get there. Although we can't see anything, perhaps we might encounter a...

"Ah no no no, what the hell am I talking about!" Fitch raised his hand to cover his face. "Does Mr. Lin even care about such things?

Fitch was simply an ignorant country bumpkin seeing the world for the first time. Surely others who attended the banquet would find these topics boring and vulgar, right?

"These upper-class people... No, I can't think like an ordinary person anymore. I'm a transcendent being now. I have to think and speak like one!" muttered Fitch to himself as he made up his mind. Then, he winked at the mirror and danced for a bit before he suddenly noticed a patch of greenish-black under his eyes. His eyes were bloodshot and his face was pale. It was obvious that Fitch hadn't slept well.

He hadn't slept well indeed. In fact, Fitch hadn't slept at all last night and had spent all that time studying the book *Nest of Evil*.

He was mesmerized by the contents and was immersed in the book. If he had to describe it, it felt as if he had actually had a deep sleep and realized the sky was already bright when he woke up.

At the same time, it felt as if there was a bubble deep within his soul bursting forth, giving birth to a new him.

That was indeed his ability improving... It was wonderful and truly unbelievable.

Till now, he was still in that excited state and didn't feel any bit of tiredness.

Fitch was very satisfied with his sloppy image. He looked around and nodded. "This is just about right... Mr. Lin would be able to tell how hard I worked last night at a glance! He will definitely be delighted!"

Fitch felt that he had mastered how a transcendent being thought.

His current appearance definitely did not conform to the normal social rules—Fitch looked sloppy and listless for such a classy banquet. And he could imagine those people looking at him already.

From the beginning, given his status and cheap attire, those people already viewed him with disdain. Now, it would definitely be worse.

"But what does it matter? Rather, it's apt to say that I love seeing the malice beneath the sanctimonious facades of these so-called upper-class people." Fitch smiled proudly. "Now, I only need to care about what Mr. Lin thinks. Perhaps he will give me some pointers after seeing how hard I worked.

"Surely I'm the only one who can think of that—you're a genius, Fitch!" Fitch praised himself generously. He tugged at his bow tie, then stepped out with a puffed up chest and head held high as he headed for Lin Jie's room.

Humph! Especially so that noble youth who suddenly appeared last night and interrupted Fitch's plans and even stole away Mr. Lin.

As a transcendent being, Fitch could tell right away that this guy was a threat! Not playing nice yesterday had indeed been the right decision! But all this didn't matter. Fitch had won!

Fitch felt really pleased with himself the more he thought about it. He eventually reached Lin Jie's room and prepared to knock on the door respectfully.

Creak~

The door of the neighboring room suddenly opened.

Fitch immediately went on the alert, but his face fell. *This is that kid's room! Looks like he noticed. To think that he's actually this proactive. Heh, but this time, I won't...*

Fitch had gotten himself all pumped up, only to see Greg stagger out of the door, dragging his feet weakly. The latter's hair was in a mess, and his movements as sluggish as a zombie's.

Having sensed someone beside him, Greg looked up, revealing an extremely haggard face.

"..." Fitch's eyes widened.

After a night, the well-dressed youngster seemed to have turned very pale. His eyes were lifeless, lips dry and cracked, and even his face seemed to have become thinner. It was as if he had aged by at least ten years.

What exactly happened last night?! No...

Fitch recovered from his shock as suspicions crept up in his heart. Did this kid have the same idea as him?

"Hey..." Fitch stepped forward and put out his hand to block Greg's path.

However, Greg was frowning and walked around Fitch, all the while mumbling indistinct words like "demon", "it's all my fault", "I must redeem my mistake", and so on. His face alternated between conflicted, regretful, and anxious expressions as if he was possessed.

Fitch thought to himself, *This kid is even more overzealous than me. That won't do! If Mr. Lin sees him like this, he definitely won't notice me...*

Thus, he put his hand on Greg's shoulder and pulled the latter back just as he was about to reach the door. Greg's eyes immediately turned red as he turned around and shouted angrily, "Let go!"

Fitch was suddenly intrigued seeing him like this and chuckled. "Why? What if I don't let go? I've been annoyed by you since yesterday. Well, think about it, shouldn't resolving issues between transcendent beings be done with strength? Why don't you give it a try if you want me to let go, heh."

While his words were rather childish, Fitch didn't hold back. A strange light flashed in his eyes and the distorted colors were almost nauseating. His mental domain instantly expanded and assaulted Greg.

A mind manipulation ability!

Greg was shocked. Recalling the information he had gotten from Wiston to help look into last night, he immediately chanted a mental incantation to stabilize his mind. At the same time, he multi-tasked and used his best shape-shifting ability which turned his hand into a wolf claw that grabbed Fitch's arm!

The best way to interrupt a transcendent being that used mind abilities was to directly attack the main body. This fellow actually dared to stay so close! It was obvious that he had never experienced actual combat!

While Greg was going through inner turmoil, this ignorant fellow in front of him would suffice as his punching bag.

"Ah!"

Click.

Creak—

Eh? What's that sound?

The door to Lin Jie's room opened abruptly. The young bookstore owner came out with his back turned and closed the door. When he turned around, he stopped in the tracks and observed the two youngsters standing on his left and right as if they were sentries. There was approximately two meters between them, and both seemed to assume strange postures.

"Both of you look like crap early in the morning. Did you guys not sleep well?" Boss Lin asked with a concerned look on his face.

"Uh... very, very well. I slept very well. Thank you for your concern." Fitch forced a smile. Cold sweat had formed on his forehead as he waved a hand as a greeting while hiding the other broken hand behind his back.

"Me... Me too." Greg took a deep breath, enduring the various negative emotions that were clouding his mind. He almost wanted to kneel on the ground and smash his head against the ground.

Chapter 349: Be More Careful When You Are Walking

Greg was anxious and worried the entire night after hearing news that the situation might be unfavorable to Joseph. The immense pressure of saving Joseph and everyone else near 67th Avenue was placed entirely on his shoulders which made him tense and suffocated.

At present, Fitch's ability was affecting him, making Greg feel like a balloon that was being filled with water, on the verge of immediately exploding if it was intensified.

Fitch, on the other hand, was a newly ascended transcendent being. He had previously been a vagrant most of the time in the past and had never been injured to such an extent before and was nearly crying from the pain.

Fortunately, he was no longer the same as before. He instantly used his ability to block out the pain receptors in his mind. The trembling and cold sweat was just a result from the residual pain from the clash.

Both sides suffered heavily in this confrontation.

Greg thought to himself, *This demon really loves toying with people's hearts... Actually showing up just as we were about to fight. Like hell anyone would believe that it's a coincidence!*

Damn it! It's just like what happened in the bookstore previously... Deliberately letting me witness Joseph fall and causing lasting psychological trauma. Greg gritted his teeth.

And now, the bookstore owner had deliberately made him take on this heavy task alone. If Greg could not overcome the trauma from back then, he would definitely not be able to get out of this dead end.

Even more frightening was the fact that he had found another transcendent being from out of nowhere. This was clearly a new face that had never been seen before, yet this individual had instantly become a devoted follower.

According to the information Greg had gotten from Winston last night, Fitch was actually related to the Path of the Flaming Sword—This fellow had become a transcendent being due to a ‘sublimation’ plan of the Path of the Flaming Sword that Secret Rite Tower was investigating; part of a greater plan that involved the shadow assassins.

Those that became a part of this ‘sublimation’ plan had one thing in common. That was going from an ordinary person to becoming a mid-level transcendent being.

However, Fitch had nothing to do with the bookstore previously and was merely noted as an insignificant name.

However, since the owner of the bookstore had chosen to interact with this person, everything must have been premeditated.

However, more and more clues were intertwined together like a ball of wool, making it even more puzzling as to why he had come to attend the banquet this time...

Greg glanced at Fitch. Since there was no way to get answers directly from the bookstore owner, he might as well start with this man.

Lin Jie blinked several times as he observed Greg and Fitch who were glaring at each other covertly. He felt that there was something strange going on between the two.

To put it in words, it was as if there was a smell of gunpowder in the air.

Is there some sort of conflict between the two of them? Didn't they only meet last night?

Why does it seem as if they are old foes this early in the morning? Seeing how tired both of them are, could something have happened last

night... But it appears that they don't want anyone else to know, huh?
Mmm...

As an understanding friend of theirs, Lin Jie naturally wouldn't interfere. It definitely wasn't because competition between customers would make it much better to sell books!

Lin Jie gave the two a beaming smile. "That's good if so. By the way, you two should have gotten to know each other, right?"

Greg nodded while Fitch shook his head.

"?"Lin Jie raised an eyebrow.

The two youngsters made eye contact. Greg's face was devoid of emotion, yet Fitch perceived it to be full of contempt and disdain as if to say, *"I've already seen through you, and you know nothing about me."*

Fitch couldn't stand the arrogant mug. He was so pissed, he burst out laughing and immediately went to Lin Jie's side and shamelessly said, "It seems that I'm ignorant indeed. Mr. Lin, please help me with the introductions. By the way, I still have loads of questions to ask you. For example, I read the book you gave me yesterday. Inside it says—"

Greg didn't expect that with just his single reaction, the speaking rights now belonged to Fitch. The latter just wouldn't stop talking.

Lin Jie was also very obliging, enthusiastically helping solve Fitch's confusion and chatted happily with him.

Greg felt like a clown. *No* , the aristocratic youth gritted his teeth. *This fellow is just too thick-skinned!*

Fortunately, Lin Jie was someone that was always fair. He even turned back and asked, "Lil Greg, do you want to join us for breakfast?"

Lil... Lil Greg?

Greg's felt as if his face was about to split open. While he knew that

the bookstore owner would even call someone like Wilde ‘Old Wil,’ being addressed in this manner was still somewhat difficult for him to accept...

“I’ll come!” Greg decided not to think.

Having seized the opportunity to speak, he immediately carried on, “Actually, I’ve heard from Sir Joseph about how special your bookstore is. I’m also rather interested in the books you sell. Since you saw through my troubles yesterday, do you have any books you might recommend for me?”

Fitch smiled insincerely. “Ah, it’s almost time! Let’s go eat first. Breakfast would stop being served once the next banquet starts. We have to hurry.”

This again! Greg wanted to leap over and rip this guy’s head off. Rising blood pressure made him feel as if the veins in his temples were throbbing. After taking several deep breaths to calm himself, he mentally recited the ‘Grease’ incantation.

Humph, black magicians aren’t easily bullied pushovers...

Squeak—Crash!

Fitch slipped and fell flat onto the ground. His face was blank at first before anger quickly came flooding in..

He had already blocked all his sensation of pain, but the feeling of being humiliated in front of Lin Jie was way more unbearable.

Boss Lin was caught off guard and dumbfounded by this fall on flat ground. “Are you alright?”

Fitch got up and forced a weak smile. “I’m fine, I’m fine...”

Lin Jie eyed the glistening puddle on the ground that hadn’t seemed to be there a second ago. With a frown, he rubbed his chin and looked around. “Where did this oil come from? Could it be seeping out? But that shouldn’t be the case...”

Would such a weird problem exist in a massive mansion that was being

cleaned and maintained every single day?

He then abruptly looked toward Greg with a look of suspicion.

Greg's heart skipped a beat as a vague sense of extreme foreboding came over him. As if something terrifying would happen if the owner of the bookstore in front of him realized the truth...

Thus, he uttered somewhat stiffly, "Uh... It's actually rather normal. This sort of ground usually requires being polished by a special oil, so there might be a portion leftover somewhere. Then, when the indoor heater is turned on, the oil melts and when a person walks past, the pressure on the floor squeezes the oil out."

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow. "Is that so?"

Greg nodded and patted his chest. "As a noble, I know a little about this sort of building. You can trust me."

Lin Jie considered for a bit and felt that it made sense. After all, Greg was a real aristocrat, a person with all the riches.

With a shake of his head, he patted Fitch's arm. "Be more careful when you are walking. Don't fall again! Otherwise, you won't be able to participate in the rest of the banquet if you get sent to the hospital."

Fitch trembled, because that was his injured hand.

Did Boss Lin mean to warn him that he would be out if he wasn't strong enough?

Chapter 350: Snowflake

Fitch swallowed and quickly forced out a smile. "I'm fine, my body is in good shape. I'll be fine even if I fall a few more times. See, I can still run and jump with no problems."

He deliberately jumped on the spot twice to prove his robustness.

He certainly didn't want to be eliminated now. This banquet had just begun, and there were already undercurrents in full flow. It was hard to imagine what big thing would happen next.

Wasn't this scenario a huge occasion where he needed to participate and make his presence known as much as possible? He definitely couldn't miss it!

However, in truth, he reckoned that he would first need to find some place to treat his arm after breakfast. Otherwise, he would probably end up completely crippled soon... Still, it really wasn't a big deal if he was really crippled, for he could swap out his crippled arm for a prosthetic limb sold by Rolle Resource.

In any case, he no longer had to rely on playing the violin to survive, nor was his ability dependent on his physical body.

As for whether Rolle Resource would be willing to sell him one of those expensive prosthetics that were usually exclusive for specific people... The answer was a definite yes. After all, he was now a lackey of Boss Lin!

Regardless of whether these people were aware of Boss Lin's true strength, on the surface, Boss Lin was still an esteemed guest specially invited by the Ji Family and clearly had extraordinary ties to Young Miss Ji.

Since Fitch could now walk together with Boss Lin, it meant that he could already be hooked up with Rolle Resource. No matter the case, Rolle Resource definitely wouldn't disregard someone related to Boss Lin.

But of course, the prerequisite was that he could maintain a relatively good relationship with Boss Lin...

"It's good that you're fine." Lin Jie was slightly relieved seeing Fitch able to move about, but he still exhorted, "You must tell me if you really feel uncomfortable anywhere. I can get someone to send you to the hospital."

Greg immediately chimed in earnestly, "I can call my servants to help carry you away."

This kid is definitely gloating! Fitch gritted his teeth and uttered, "Thanks for your concern, but there's really no need. I'm totally fine now."

Greg scoffed in silence, ignoring Fitch's murderous gaze.

He continued pandering to Lin Jie and pretended to ask humbly, "Mr. Lin, continuing from where I left off, could you recommend a few books for me? Sir Joseph says that your books are like a bitter yet effective remedy, capable of saving those that are deeply confused and even helping them find direction and a goal in life."

As an investigator, natural disguise and smooth performances were necessary skills.

He wouldn't have been in such a sorry state if Lin Jie hadn't suddenly appeared at the door.

However, Lin Jie did not immediately recommend a book with taboo contents to him. On the contrary, the bookstore owner patted Greg's shoulder and said earnestly, "Your problem involves interpersonal relationships, identity differentiation, and some psychological issue. It isn't something that can be easily resolved just by self-study."

Taken aback, Greg asked, "Then... what do you think is best?"

Lin Jie smiled warmly and said, "If you don't mind, I can speak with you more over the next few days. I'm rather decent at psychological counseling myself. If you don't believe me, you can ask your teacher."

“...”

Ignoring certain prerequisites, chatting with the bookstore owner was indeed the most beneficial method.

For example, Joseph had often received guidance and had now advanced to Supreme-rank.

But at the same time, it also meant that Greg might have already become a pawn that could be used or discarded at any time.

No, this has already been confirmed... Greg now felt that his attendance at this banquet was surely premeditated.

Since Lin Jie had said so, there was no way Greg could refute. This would also create more opportunities to communicate with the bookstore owner.

So be it if it's more dangerous... Nothing can be even more dangerous than the situation I'm in now anyway

, thought Greg.

Of course, he was no longer alone but had the backing of the entire Secret Rite Tower. As long as the present situation didn't change too much, he didn't have to be too afraid of Lin Jie's 'brainwashing.'

Thus, Greg nodded. "I don't mind, of course... As long as it doesn't trouble you."

Fitch saw that the situation that he had worked so hard to gain control was being reversed. Noting that Lin Jie was rather spirited, he quickly interjected, "Ah, we're here! Whoa this place is huge, and there are all sorts of food varieties, some that I've never seen before. As expected of a gathering of the upper class~"

While Fitch had used a slightly sarcastic tone with a slightly higher pitch for attracting attention, the breakfast area before them was just as he described. It was a bright and spacious dining hall, not in any way inferior to the previous night's banquet venue.

At present, well-dressed guests were already here, eating quietly in

their corners or making conversation.

Usually, when the Ji Family received guests that stayed overnight, the maids would typically be asked to send breakfasts directly to their rooms the next day.

Since this banquet was also to serve guests a platform for high-end social interactions, they had to give the guests opportunities to interact with each other as much as possible.

...However, when there was communication, there would naturally be conflicts. At this moment, Fitch's voice was especially loud and conspicuous.

But when they frowned and looked over, they realized the person standing behind this fellow was one of the parties involved in the annihilation of the Fred Family yesterday. Thus, their desire to berate him was stifled, and they could only sweep their complaints away...

While they didn't know much about this guy by the name of Lin Jie, it was clear that Young Miss Ji valued him.

They couldn't afford to offend him. After all, no one wanted to be a second John.

Lin Jie looked around and agreed with Fitch. "It's indeed huge..."

This breakfast hall was even larger than his bookstore, and that came as quite a blow to him. It was no wonder that Fitch, who had made his way up from the bottom, had a slightly sour attitude when he saw the place.

However, all this had nothing to do with him. Lin Jie was here just to freeload. The larger the dining hall, the better. Lin Jie shrugged and prepared himself to start feasting.

Not far off, a blonde girl in a plain white dress suddenly became alert, turning to look in Lin Jie's directions. Surprise and a tinge of fanaticism filled her face as she started to blush slightly.

She immediately lifted the hem of her skirt and strode toward Lin

Jie, leaving the nobles that were beside her dumbfounded.

Lin Jie had just picked his seat when he heard a quavering “Mr. Lin.” He glanced up and saw a familiar face.

“Ah, it’s you.”

One of Wilde’s new assistants—Charlotte, who went by ‘Snowflake.’

Chapter 351: Wilde's Way Out

"Snowflake... Ah no, I should address you as Charlotte. It's been awhile, I never imagined we would meet here. What a coincidence."

Lin Jie was a little surprised. He hadn't expected to meet anyone he knew at this banquet.

Even though he had only seen her once, she could still be considered an acquaintance. After all, he had given a lecture to all of Old Wil's new assistants.

As the saying went, a teacher for a day is a father for life... Ahem, not saying that he really had to be someone else's father. It was just the logic of the saying that the relationship of a teacher and student was rather deep.

...Speaking of which, he had jokingly said to Greg last night that he wanted to see the youngster meet with Old Wil's assistants, and alas, that came true today.

A real coincidence...

He turned around and saw Greg exchanging glances with Fitch with a terrified look on his face.

While such a level of coincidence was downright eerie, this really had nothing to do with Lin Jie. He spread his hands out and shrugged, indicating that he, too, was helpless when it came to him being a jinx.

Greg was already numb to this demon's acts of pretense. No matter how true it appeared, this demon had surely meant for it to happen!

However, what was most important right now wasn't to discuss the true wicked nature of this demon but how to face Wilde's assistant, who was standing barely a meter away...

Unexpectedly, Greg felt relatively calm.

While he had been caught off guard, he learned the true identity and appearance of 'Snowflake' from Boss Lin—the true identities of Wilde's aides, who hid their faces under masks, hadn't yet to be determined even till today.

After all, they had appeared all too abruptly and hadn't left any clues to follow. With Wilde a master of hiding that had evaded Secret Rite Tower's eyes for a whole two years as their ringleader, tracking down the identities of these people was too monumental a task.

Or at least, Secret Rite Tower hadn't been able to invest enough manpower in this short span of time to investigate it fully.

But when Greg thought about how he was still an important chess piece of Boss Lin's and a source of great entertainment for the bookstore owner... he felt surprisingly at ease.

After all, as long as he retained some value, he wouldn't be abandoned so easily. At most, he would be toyed with, but his life wouldn't be in danger.

As Greg furtively put up his guard, he started to wonder if there was anything wrong with his current mental state.

However, Greg's wariness seemed destined to be all for naught at the present moment.

Charlotte didn't seem to have eyes for anybody else. Lifting the hem of her skirt and bowing to Lin Jie, she said softly with blushing cheeks, "I never thought I would be able to see you here."

She couldn't hide her excitement and even her hands were shaking. As an aide of Wilde who did the bidding of the bookstore owner... or rather, henchmen, she was the only one that hadn't been involved in the battle on 67th Avenue.

The reason was simple. Renowned for his cunning, Wilde would never leave himself without a way out.

Even in the battle against his old foe Joseph, under the premise that he would be going all out, Wilde had still asked Charlotte to

prepare the teleportation array. As long as she received the order, she would be able to teleport Wilde over without anyone knowing.

Wilde had always been cautious. As for Charlotte, she followed the plan and attended this mortal banquet that she had been invited for due to her noble status as an ordinary person. And this was Ji Zhixiu's birthday banquet.

However, it was precisely because of this that Charlotte spent a lot of time preparing this foolproof teleportation spell, causing her to miss the opening banquet and could only start from the second day's breakfast.

Yet, she never imagined to see the Lord here!

All of their actions had indeed been seen by their Lord... Then... could it be that their omniscient Lord had personally come to witness the outcome that was hidden in the future?

No, she couldn't predict the Lord's intentions and just abide the Lord's wishes. Even an order would be of a lower priority than that.

From this moment on, her mission might change.

Charlotte's breathing quickened at the thought that she might be fortunate to be of use to the Lord. With a fervently burning gaze, she asked Lin Jie, "Is that anything you require of me? If there is, order me as you please."

Her expression and words, coupled with her flushed face, made her seem as if she were in love. But If one observed carefully, they would discover that the light in her eyes was not admiration but more like devotion.

It was just like how zealots would want to prostrate themselves and kiss the ground in front of the god they believe in should the god appear.

However, due to the restrictions of the occasion, she couldn't kneel down and kiss the floor before Lin Jie in public to show her loyalty. Therefore, what she appeared like was no different from a young lady that had just seen her sweetheart.

Elsewhere, the group of nobles that Charlotte had been mingling with moments ago were all taken aback.

It was all just inconceivable... The young lady known for her ice-cold demeanor, that lofty flower high up on a mountain top, had actually bluntly expressed such emotions to a someone of the opposite sex. This was simply a finding that thoroughly shook the group to the core.

Then, someone in the group matched the face of this amicable-looking young man to his memory. This was the person who was invited by Ji Zhixiu to join her for the first dance and also the one involved in the Fred Family massacre.

“This is more shocking than seeing a ghost...”

“There must be something wrong with this guy!” Their hearts were in a jumble from witnessing such a peculiar occurrence.

At the other side, Lin Jie’s lips twitched involuntarily. *How do I put it? It feels like I have some sort of strange luck with women recently. Why are all these girls so... enthusiastic?*

Forget Young Miss Ji, but why did this student he met only once have such thoughts?

Isn’t her phrasing somewhat weird?

“No... There’s no need to order you.” Lin Jie shook his head and rebuffed, “That would make me seem like some sort of evil slave driver... But I do want to ask for your help.”

Charlotte’s eyes lit up like a dog that had spotted a bone as she nodded her head vigorously. “Please feel free.”

Greg’s eyes narrowed, and his vigilance heightened to the extremes. Anxiety gripped him as he thought, *Is he finally going to make a move?*

Lin Jie said, “Umm... You seem to have arrived before us and should have gotten a better understanding... Do you have any recommendations for breakfast?”

Greg froze in place. “...”

Fitch let out a small snort of laughter.

Charlotte was still enthusiastic as she bowed again. “It’s my honor to serve you. I think the honey cake and black tea here are most worth tasting...”

With a smile, she made an ‘after you’ with her arms. Lin Jie nodded and walked ahead.

Then, Charlotte turned toward Greg and stuck out her tongue, licking her lips and revealing runes engraved in black on the underside of her tongue. Then she shot Greg a terrifying gaze and said with mental intimidation unique to black magicians. “Come along, black magician that has pledged allegiance to Secret Rite Tower. Death will follow you like a shadow before the Lord announces the final victory.”

In a corner of a manor that no one knew about, the laws of spacetime distorted, causing the entire space to temporarily overlap.

The surrounding vegetation lasted for a second in the state of rebirth and withering before turning into nothingness.

A slender and beautiful bronze arm, along with a half-naked female body of the same color, suddenly appeared from the spatial ripples.

She only had half a body, as if something had sliced her in two straight from the top of her head. However, there was no flesh nor blood, just a multitude of vibrant illusory threads that were seemingly connected into the unknown.

Her long metallic-looking hair fluttered in the air, and her rust green pupils seemed muddled with chaos.

If Michael was here, he would definitely recognize that this was one of the angels he was waiting for—Haniel.

Chapter 352: Caught In Her Own Trap

Just like the other Path of the Flaming Sword founding members, Haniel wasn't a real angel. This name was in all essence just a meaningless code name.

However, unlike the other members, Haniel did not have a real name. Therefore, when Michael suggested Haniel as her code name, she thought that it wasn't bad and accepted it gladly and just simply used it as her name.

For most transcendent beings, a 'real name' possessed far more meaning, even possibly carving their destiny. Thus, most wouldn't accept a word of unknown origins to be used as their name.

However, for Haniel, words expressed in the common language of the continent could not affect her at all, so it did not matter. After all, she belonged to a somewhat special race.

"From what I'm sensing, the faint last remnants of that aura is here..." Haniel floated in midair and tilted her head up slightly as her rust green eyes that seemed muddled with chaos stared blankly ahead.

She extended her only arm and closed her fist as if grabbing something. At this moment, the space around her compressed like paper being crumpled and formed a series of nodes filled with information.

Rays of light shot out and met her glabella, displaying the image that matched the faint trace of that aura.

A young black-haired man stopped in his tracks, looking out of place amidst the crowd that was moving forward as he started to speak with a weak transcendent being that had the mark of the Path of the Flaming Sword. At some point, he opened a dream fissure and pulled out a book.

A faint cry for help from one of Haniel's kind also seeped out from the dream realm at the same time, but it only lasted for an instant before it ceased as the fissure closed.

Pop!

Haniel clenched her fist and crushed the first node from the past, frowning as she watched the spots of light disappear.

"A dream fissure... He actually opened it so easily? Also, his strength... It seems shrouded by some sort of fog making it impossible for me to sense. But this shouldn't be a problem for me. I just have to go back in time..."

Haniel's eyes were half-closed. Illusory afterimages that her formed wings were like wriggling neon tubes, emitting occasional bursts of colorful light as if resonating with something.

"So that's how it is... A half-dragon body shaped by the Dragon Marrow Tree's fruit and the Petrified Dragon Heart, bestowed with the dream realm's power by Silver and continual help from that mysterious existence of a mysterious existence, as well as those books of unknown origins. Interesting.

"Going from an ordinary person to Supreme-rank in half a year. A great undertaking indeed, it has to be said. But this is still far from being considered surpassing Supreme-rank. Moreover, this isn't what he achieved on his own... What's really worth paying attention to is that mysterious existence that hasn't yet appeared and Silver... Hmm?

"Silver's aura has weakened so much, as if she's left. Hah, great. The difficulty is lowered.

"Speaking of which, isn't the goal of Michael and the others to open a way into dreams and obtain a path to ascension within the dream realm? In other words, this guy is already standing at the end point that they have spent thousands of years planning.

"No wonder they are gathering all the angels to work together this time. Indeed, an enemy of this level is deserving of being wary of.

“Heh, but these are just mere tricks to me.”

Haniel scoffed nonchalantly with a look of extreme arrogance and calmness as if she had everything under control.

No dimension can escape my perception and control. Even the dream realm is a place I can come and go as I please... Merely a place with nothing since a long time ago. There's no 'true god' at all, just a nest of primitive creations born from primordial chaos. The fear that people have of it is just manifestations of their ignorance.

Although these primordial creations are indeed powerful when compared to those four witches... No, compared to Silver and Fraxinus, all of these are inferior. It's no wonder they could slumber peacefully in the dream realm for so many years.

Haniel followed the trail left by the node and floated forward with a look of mocking and disdain on her face. “How could I have joined this so-called ‘Path of the Flaming Sword’ if it hadn’t been for me wanting to see the wonderful expression these guys make when they realize all their effort is meaningless after spending so much trying to reach a place that is just a ‘trash heap.’ “

Snowflakes fell all around and passed through her body without any obstruction, only creating subtle circular ripples, indicating that this body did not actually exist in this time and space but was only a sort of projection-like existence.

And her true form was, without doubt, a huge butterfly with its wings folded, connected with her half body on the continuous timeline, which was the unknown, shrouded by illusory threads.

That’s right, Haniel’s true form was the evolved form of the Clock-wheel Worm. An evolved one from the countless worms wriggling in the timeline—Chronos Butterfly.

Her half-human body was materialized according to her notion of the aesthetics of human society she had perceived over the years and thus seemed chaotic in a sense.

...After all, a bug couldn’t be expected to completely understand

human aesthetics.

The purpose of Haniel's trip was precisely because she sensed the aura of someone that had helped her when she was but a Clock-wheel Worm.

Countless years ago, a human family employed a special method to capture her and used her to manipulate her to a small extent. Eventually, she was even passed down from generation to generation as a family heirloom.

Before Haniel had a name, such a triviality didn't interest her at all. After all, as a bug, eating and sleeping were the only two things they cared about and nothing else was worth being bothered by.

However, after observing human society for thousands of years, she gradually learned 'personal desires.'

It was only recently when awoken by Michael that she felt like she had broken out of her cocoon again. Looking back at all that had come to pass, it was like an entirely different experience.

Especially seeing that minute companion of hers being captured and hearing that faint wail that lasted for thousands of years made anger start to well up in her for the first time.

Unable to control herself, she didn't head for the location that Michael had set. Instead, Haniel had come alone to seek out the person who now possessed the Clock-wheel Worm Box.

And now, she was going to take back her companion.

The countless multicolored illusory treads that were Haniel's 'wings' stretched out. Without anyone in the manor noticing, it gradually expanded and covered the sky.

Space and time around the manor distorted, causing cracks to appear as if unable to withstand this phenomenon.

As if an invisible cocoon had fallen into a net.

Haniel, who was floating towards the final node, information point,

never once realized that... beneath what ought to be her mere
illusory body... was a shadow following closely behind.

Chapter 353: Boss Lin's Instructions

Seated on the sofa in his study, Ji Bonong rubbed his hands together uneasily. He wasn't the picture of calm from the previous night when he stood before everyone but was more like a nervous middle-aged man now.

According to the arrangements of the banquet, today was Ji Zhixiu's actual birthday, which was also the time where guests presented their birthday gifts. Boss Lin, too, would naturally give his own present.

However, since the collaboration had already been decided and Ji Zhixiu was set to depend on Boss Lin in future, this gift didn't cause Ji Bonong too much anxiety.

What he was actually worried about was the gift that Boss Lin was going to give him.

"Dear Father, please calm down. You are like an ant on a hot pan." Ji Zhixiu joked expressionlessly from the side as she did some touching up on her outfit and appearance.

As today's program was an open air banquet, she had changed into a more casual white dress, with the red rose still pinned to her chest. The true form of the rose was still rooted beneath the base camp 'Spider,' the hunter group that she had founded. Now, the one on Ji Zhixiu's chest was one of its many clones, but that didn't mean it was weak.

The other clones included the ones in the rose garden outside the manor, as well as the decorative roses in vases that could be seen everywhere throughout the manor. All of them served as constantly monitoring apparatus, which allowed Ji Zhixiu to be aware of the situation within the manor at all times.

Ji Bonong choked and stared at his daughter. "If I'm an ant, doesn't

that make you a little ant?”

Ji Zhixiu: “...”

She was about to comfort her father when she suddenly received a message from her rose. Immediately stiffening up, she whispered, “Boss Lin is awake and has gone to the restaurant. He’s currently talking to someone... and the conversation seems to be related to the Ji Family.”

Ji Bonong became even more anxious at once and inhaled sharply. “There’s surely a greater meaning behind this. Perhaps just like last night, these are instructions—what did these people say?”

Lin Jie put down the honey cake and black tea in his hands at one of the tables before sitting down and thanked the servant that had helped him pull out the chair.

Although Charlotte was very proactive in wanting to help him carry this breakfast, Lin Jie did not think that he needed to be so deprived.

A hint of surprise flashed across the servant’s face. Then, out of professionalism, he quickly adjusted mentally and hid his smile. With a bow, he asked Lin Jie, “Do you have any other requests?”

“Nope. That’s all.” Lin Jie shook his head before looking toward the other three who shook their heads as well.

The servant nodded. “I’ll be waiting at the side. Please call me if you need anything.”

Lin Jie watched the servant head to a corner and couldn’t help but lament, “Even the servants in the Ji Family’s manor are of a different class.”

Fitch, who was considered of the ‘lower class,’ nodded. He could sense it as well and pointed out of habit, “Last night, the servants that welcomed guests outside were arrogant to those that didn’t look ‘noble’ and gave preferential treatment to the rich and affluent. Now, the servants that are inside the manor are always gentle and polite to everyone—as if all guests are the same.”

Fitch continued his rant through gritted teeth, “Most probably because the servants within the manor have surely only seen those that are qualified to enter, so they’ve always been humble and polite. As far as I know, these servants must have lived in the manor since young and might not even know how the poor live. With this comparison and knowledge, there wouldn’t be any difference in their treatment of others. But regardless of whatever it is, this is all a poison of the class system!

“—A poison of an age that needs to be cleansed,” finished Fitch as he glared at the macaroni on his plate and poked at it venomously with his fork.

This was a blatant accusation. Greg and Charlotte, who were from noble families, were directly attacked. Charlotte merely smiled while cutting a small piece of bread but didn’t say anything. On the other hand, Greg retorted at once, “However, the Ji Family aren’t these so-called aristocrats at all. They were just downtrodden wanderers that came from the Northern Lands. There weren’t anything special then, just some commoners that relied on the support of the Central District to obtain some benefits and were used as tools to excavate the Lower District.

“What made them reach where they are now isn’t your so-called class system. It’s just that with power and strength in their hands, they gradually forgot their original selves.”

A certain commoner that had just obtained power: “...”

Is it really okay for you all to be throwing shade at the Ji Family, at Ji Zhixiu’s birthday banquet being hosted at Ji Bonong’s manor?! Haa... I can’t help but sigh at the difference in attitude.

Lin Jie’s lips were twitching as he thought to himself. *I can only say... It’s fortunate Ji Zhixiu didn’t come over today. Otherwise, it would be impossible to prevent a fight from breaking out.*

Ji Zhixiu, who was listening in, nodded as if she completely understood. She then turned to her father and said, “Boss Lin is using these transcendent beings to warn us not to be carried away with the superior mentality we have from gaining power. Don’t

forget our roots and that we were once commoners and... he's very dissatisfied with the remnants of the noble class."

Ji Bonong was immediately alarmed and uttered, "That is what we ought to do. A family that has been used as tools for thousands of years will not use others as tools to push around. Everything that we will do in the future is to seek more well-being for ordinary mortals like us."

With a slight sneer, Ji Zhixiu nodded. "But... His attitude toward the Fred Family yesterday already shows a great deal. It seems that these aristocratic vermin in the Central District are finally approaching their doom.

"And perhaps, this might also be our first battle to gain complete control of Rolle Resource."

"Alright, alright. I was just casually mentioning it. There's no need to get that worked up. It's not that serious." Lin Jie waved his hand and gestured for these two firecrackers to sit down. "Breakfast is more important than all that. Come on, the food's getting cold."

"You're right." Greg and Fitch immediately nodded and shut their mouths upon hearing Boss Lin's words as they obediently started to dig into their breakfast.

Charlotte who had been sitting on the sidelines watching the bickering pair smiled and readily agreed. "Yes, that's right. Boss Lin is right here, but you two are arguing by yourselves. Learn some manners, guys!"

This scheming woman!

"No, no, no. This isn't an argument. It's just a friendly discussion. Right, Fitch?"

Greg forced a smile, nearly snapping the fork in his hand. Alarm bells were ringing in his head. He couldn't afford to tangle with Fitch any longer. Right now, the real enemy was the woman before him.

"Yes, yes, yes. We respect Boss Lin very much. Let's eat, let's eat."

Fitch also realized the problem as he eyed Charlotte warily.

Charlotte acted as if she didn't notice and said enthusiastically, "Boss Lin, it's best to have the honey cake while it's warm; if not, it will become stringy."

"Is that so? Then I'll have to hurry and have a taste."

Lin Jie nodded and picked up his fork and knife, studying the tempting honey cake and trying to work out the best angle to cut into it.

At that moment, a hair-raising sensation came over the three transcendent beings as they all looked up at the top of the dining hall.

All the roses in the manor simultaneously became engorged as sharp, ferocious-looking barbs grew out. Abscessed eyeballs popped out in the center of their petals, trembling violently in fear while making a low in-decipher buzz.

At this very moment, Ji Zhixiu felt the same sensation of fear as the roses, and she broke out in cold sweat while goose pimples popped out on her skin. An unfamiliar and powerful pressure had appeared in the manor, causing her pupils to narrow as she stepped backward. "Supreme-rank?!"

Chapter 354: He's Going To Eat

“Wha—”

The three who were eating with Lin Jie trembled as they gazed up at the top of the dining hall in horror.

As the venue within the manor for breakfast, this built-in dining hall naturally was extraordinary. The arched dome at the top was an entire piece of hollowed-out stained glass that was originally used for lighting and decoration.

At this moment, beyond the glass, a huge shadow could be seen unfolding in midair.

Colorful gleams of light like tentacles, or ribbons, floated and flowed with a chaotic rhythm, covering the entire sky and forming an indistinct shape like that of a butterfly's wings that were about to begin flapping.

Those countless gleams of light flowed down from the walls, refracted through the glass, or even seeped through the space-time cracks all around. Some even came into contact with the tip of Fitch's nose.

The drifter's body was stiff, and his face covered in cold sweat as he stared at the incomparable strange light, nearly becoming cross-eyed in the process. He was muddled-headed and at a loss of what to do.

Of course, besides the visual experience, their instincts as transcendent beings were also tremendously agitated.

Still, Charlotte, Greg, and Fitch weren't affected that greatly. On the other hand, the sordid blood in Ji Zhixiu's body had been stimulated by the immense pressure. Her entire body arched as she transformed into a huge half-wolf form. Her silver mane was bristled and her orange-yellow beast eyes glinted with a cold light as she let out a low hiss.

While she could control the bubbling blood within her body, it was obviously much safer to let her instincts run wild.

“Xiu... W-what’s wrong?” In comparison, as an ordinary person, Ji Bonong’s reaction wasn’t as intense. He was tucked under the wolf claw’s trembling as he called his daughter’s name.

Ji Zhixiu tried her best to continue probing the scene of the dining hall through whichever roses she had that hadn’t yet blown up and died. With an intrigued look on her face, she muttered, “It’s alright. This Supreme-rank seems to be here for Boss Lin...”

These reactions weren’t just limited to the few of them. All transcendent beings throughout the manor attending the banquet simultaneously felt an extremely stifling, indescribable sense of fear.

However, most terrifying was the fact that they couldn’t escape even if they wanted to. All who were enveloped by this sensation began to think and move extremely slowly and could only watch helplessly as their movements came to a halt.

The powerful Supreme-rank pressure that descended unexpectedly on them even made some very sensitive transcendent beings scream out as their spines and heads exploded, vaguely revealing countless translucent worms squirming in the splattered flesh.

As for how much panic and screams such a scene caused in the manor, it no longer mattered.

A never before seen Supreme-rank. That’s... that’s impossible! It’s currently in the sky above the manor establishing its own domain! And it’s a space-time domain of high mysticism. Why didn’t Secret Rite Tower react at all?!!

Greg gulped hard from the shock. At the same time, he fought against the pressure and swiveled his eyes onto Lin Jie.

But from the looks of it, Boss Lin seemed completely oblivious, his attention still fixated on the cake before him as if he was deliberating how best to cut it.

Greg, however, believed that things weren’t as simple as they

looked!

He couldn't think straight because of the fear, but he still tried his hardest to remain clear-headed. Deep down, he couldn't help feeling puzzled. *Putting aside the fact that the destructive power of this Supreme-rank being isn't any lesser than the battlefield where Teacher is at, aren't they not afraid that this demon gets angry?*

There was no Supreme-rank existence in Secret Rite Tower's intelligence files that matched the characteristics of the entity before his eyes.

However, there were no dream fissures in the surroundings, which meant that this Supreme-rank entity wasn't a dream beast from the dream realm but one that had always existed in the real world.

Was it that Secret Rite Tower hadn't noticed, or was this Supreme-rank too powerful?

Or perhaps...

Greg's line of thought was in bits and pieces, but his eyes were still on Lin Jie.

Everyone else in the dining hall was just like Greg. Like an insect within amber, frozen to the spot for all eternity.

At the same time, the ceiling of the dining hall was completely penetrated by the 'butterfly wings' formed by the prismatic light.

Haniel, floating above the dining hall, sensed that the entire manor was already completely under her control and smiled.

No one could escape the laws of time. This was her highest advantage as a Supreme-rank. Between the Supreme-rank that competed in the concept of domains, she always won.

From her point of view, Lin Jie, who was holding his knife and fork about to cut his cake, had also halted.

"Now, it's time to pronounce the verdict."

Her naked half of a female body appeared above the dome of the dining hall, her expression cold and haughty. Together with the flowing myriad of light, she was like a beautiful giant butterfly.

Haniel floated down behind Lin Jie and extended her hand, all the while smiling faintly.

Everyone felt an increasing sense of oppression. Space and time were distorting, and the threads enveloping the entire manor were quickly retracting and squeezing inward. Even creaking emitted from their bones as if they were on the verge of decay.

Haniel was making this second of time move toward infinity in her domain.

Once it succeeded, everything in this manor would be reduced to ashes and disappear in the flowing river of time, not even leaving any dregs behind.

Greg and Charlotte were trapped in their bodies, unable to break free no matter how hard they tried.

Ji Zhixiu subconsciously held her breath.

At such a critical moment, Fitch observed the dining hall that was now covered with translucent, psychedelic as a strange thought came into his mind.

“It... seems to be... flowing... down...”

Haniel suddenly saw the black-haired young man move.

He hesitated for a moment as to where he should cut. Then, his creased eyebrows loosened up and he finally made a decision. He raised the slender silver knife slightly and cut downward.

The shackles of time had no effect on him.

“Yes... stringy...”

Haniel’s haughty expression froze as it slowly changed into one of shock. However, she quickly calmed down. She was a Supreme-rank

powerhouse, after all, and even one that Michael feared. In a sense, if this person had some ability, breaking free would be out of the question.

Haniel decided to accelerate the flow of time again. She clenched her fists tightly, and her empty grip was about to become solid.

However, something stopped her.

A hand made of pitch-black shadows moved from behind her, over her shoulder, and gently covered her fist. Slowly but undeniably, the shadowy hand pried open her fingers one by one.

Greg, who had been watching Lin Jie, was shocked. He saw the shadow behind Lin Jie suddenly turn into a blurry black silhouette.

What is that...

It stood behind Haniel and ‘embraced’ her in an intimate manner, grabbing her only arm and resting its chin on her shoulder.

“Honey...”

The blade in Lin Jie’s hand cut into the middle of the honey cake and slid down bit by bit, separating the sticky and sweet honey filling from the soft sponge.

—and tore open the butterfly’s body and wings.

“Arghh...” Haniel’s expression was completely distorted in every sense as her body was silently torn apart from the middle.

Greg’s eyes were twitching and his stomach lurched.

However, what was even more frightening was that after Boss Lin cut his cake, he used the fork to scoop up the honey and send it into his mouth.

Haniel watched Lin Jie’s back in horror. She wanted to shake her head, but without a complete one, she could only tremble.

The pitch-black shadow tilted its head to the side—or what was

supposed to be its head— and opened its ‘mouth’... if the huge hole that split from the middle of its head and expanded enough to cover Haniel’s body could be called a mouth...

And chomped down.

Chapter 355: Three-Second Rule

When time was at a standstill, a scene that was like a doom painting was reflected in Greg's eyes that were no longer able to move.

In the domain of time driven by the Supreme-rank's power, everything had already begun to be annihilated. First to bear the brunt was the main building of this castle-like manor.

Light permeating the dome and walls made the dining hall start disintegrating via the power of time as parts faded, shattered, and distorted uncontrollably before turning into tiny fragments that floated.

Numerous spatial rifts like snaking bolts of black lightning would appear and vanish occasionally, devouring a portion of the objects that existed in the surrounding space.

Countless rays of iridescent light streamed down and weaved into those colorful butterfly wings. In the center, the half-nude female body that was split down the middle was like a sacrificial offering raised high and tied above a blazing bonfire. Pitch-black shadows enveloped her all around, and she had a terrified expression on her face.

The rust green blood that spurted out from her shattering body also solidified into a blooming shape within her own domain, like a strange burning fire.

Behind her, the pitch-black silhouette expanded and distorted into a massive hole, much like an open mouth.

Beneath this magnificent yet frightening scene, the culprit behind it all, the kindly-looking young man with a head full of black hair, acted as if nothing had happened.

His back was turned on this gruesome scene, and he was focused firmly on enjoying his breakfast.

Lin Jie's eyes blissfully became narrow slits as he tasted the sweet honey cake.

At the same time, the black shadow became a huge abyss-like orifice that chomped down on this Supreme-rank being, severing it in half straight in the middle.

Screechh!!

Pain! Pain! Pain!

A wail that could not be heard by humans was accompanied by an unbearable pain that no human could withstand.

Haniel, who was long shattered beyond recognition, opened her mouth wide. Vast amounts of viscous, rust green oil-like substance flowed out of her eyes uncontrollably. Her remaining quarter of her body trembled violently, and then leaned back, arching.

An indescribable terror gripped her, and Haniel, who had never before experience something like this before, felt her mind go blank.

She had only one thought left—to escape!

It wasn't just her body that was being devoured but her Laws and domain as well—her grasp of time was crumbling.

However, she was the Chronos Butterfly, a transcendent creature that relied on time.

For most Supreme-ranks, losing their Laws was akin to losing their power. But for Haniel, the collapse of the Laws was equivalent to certain death.

At this moment, she was afraid. Very afraid.

However, this atrocity would not stop just because she feared it. She was like a fly caught in a spider's web. Regardless of how hard

she struggled, it merely added a little fun to the hunter that was torturing her.

Each time the silver blade in Lin Jie's hand sliced the cake, the dark silhouette would mercilessly tear the Supreme-rank creature apart, like an innocent child ripping the wings of a butterfly he caught bit by bit.

Honey wrapped around bits of cake was sent into the bookstore owner's mouth by fork.

"It's indeed quite the delicacy; sweet honey yet not greasy. The cake is soft and delectable, and you can even taste the richness of butter. The three complement each other very well. You do have good taste, Charlotte." Lin Jie gave a satisfied sigh, commenting on the cake as if he were a gourmet. Then, he picked up his cup of black tea and took a sip.

The black shadow tore at that arrogant and unstoppable Supreme-rank body that had arrived a mere moment ago. It didn't even let go of the wings formed by the countless colorful threads as it tore it apart, chewed, and swallowed it.

Everything happened without so much as a squeak. In this suspended domain, the Supreme-rank couldn't even scream, her face only soundlessly warping into terror.

Greg and Fitch watched in disbelief. The shadow seemed to have heard Lin Jie's comment and nodded in agreement as well.

Then... What the hell is it? Could this be the true master of that unknown faith being spread by the owner of the bookstore, the... the demon god, as alleged in the information?

Greg thought to himself as he stared at the pantomime unfolding before him. Bits and pieces of ideas and speculation flashed through his mind. It was then that he suddenly realized he could think once more.

*This means that... the Supreme-rank domain is crumbling!
Unbelievable... He really crushed a Supreme-rank that had mastery over*

the Laws of time...

Greg felt his scalp go numb. A chilling fear even more terrifying than the Supreme-rank pressure he had just felt spread throughout his body, making him feel as if he had fallen into ice. If it weren't for the fact that he couldn't move, he would have run away.

Just thinking back on how he had spent quite some time facing such an existence and even disrespecting Lin Jie multiple times made Greg feel as if he had been treading on the edges of the gates of hell. Whatever remaining rationality he had was snuffed out like a candle in the wind, and he even found that he could barely control holding his bladder.

Greg slowly swiveled his barely moving eyes to see how the other two would react, but when he did, he couldn't help wincing.

Fitch seemed like he had been scared out of his wits. His eyes were lifeless and his mouth was gaping. All that was missing from this scene was a string of drool flowing down.

On the other hand, Charlotte's face seemed to be all lit up with fanaticism. If she were put on a nun's attire to pray, she would probably kneel down at once and become the most devout of fanatics.

At this moment, Greg suddenly heard something fall to the ground softly.

Then came Lin Jie's voice. "Um, it's still safe to eat if it is picked up within three seconds..."

At the same time, Greg suddenly felt the shackles of time he was subjected to thoroughly disappear.

The youngster hurriedly turned back to see the Supreme-rank creature that had been gnawed on by the black shadow till until half of its cheek and one eyebrow remaining vaporized on its own, dissipating into gleams of light that escaped outward, leaving behind a few falling bugs.

Boom!

The rapid escape of the Supreme-rank stirred up a silent storm that engulfed everything. The previously annihilated matter was spat out and reassembled, making the space-time distortions seem as if they were wooden huts in a hurricane. Only the surroundings around the black shadow remained unaffected.

Greg stiffened. *No, the shackles of time didn't disappear! It's the Supreme-rank that directly reversed its own Laws!*

Compression became expansion as the domain of time changed once again, from forward to backward!

She had withdrawn her control over time, and at the same instant, time, which had been forcefully drawn like a slingshot, instantly returned to its original position. She had used the power of the natural rebound to swim up the river of time and escape from the black shadow's control.

Haniel had given her all to escape death.

Greg observed the changes in front of him in a daze. Time suddenly leaped and the fragmented walls and dome were restored. The people that had blown up and died were revived in that split-second as the spatial rifts were erased.

The stained glass dome roof beautifully refracted the bright morning rays. People enjoying their breakfast were still chatting away happily as the pleasant chirping of birds wafted in through the windows.

It was as if nothing had even happened and everything was back to square one.

Except... for the pitch-black shadow that had now landed behind the owner of the bookstore and belched.

Lin Jie picked up the cake from the floor, but unfortunately realized that more than three seconds had elapsed.

He blinked several times as he met Greg's dazed stare before waving the servant over and saying in slight embarrassment, "Sorry for dirtying the floor. Could you please help clean it up?"

Lin Jie looked around and heaved a sigh of relief. “Fortunately, no one noticed.”

Then, he eyed the three slightly trembling youngsters and said, “Eat up, why aren’t you guys eating?”

Chapter 356: It's A Shame To Waste Food

Who in the right mind could damn well eat right now?!!

Greg's face was pale and blank, but deep down he was howling like mad, wishing he could run away just like that Supreme-rank.

However, he still had the heavy responsibility of saving Joseph. With the mission of Secret Rite Tower on his shoulders, there was no way for him to escape... Even the gods who controlled the Law of Time could not affect him. This was simply an unsolvable existence.

The only good fortune was that, for some reason, Boss Lin had decided to let the other party go. Meanwhile, the flow of time within the entire manor had returned back to normal.

No one was hurt, and no one would remember the silent battle just now other than the few of them who had witnessed the entire thing and retained their memories.

Lin Jie eyed the three youngsters before him in bewilderment. He wondered why they were frozen in strange postures and eyeing him weirdly.

Why have they all suddenly become weird after I had a few mouthfuls of cake? And they each have their own peculiarities...

Greg's face was riddled with shock. It was as if he had just witnessed a sow climb a tree and was thoroughly mortified. This was even worse than the expression he had when Lin Jie had first run into him outside his door.

Fitch, on the other hand, was in a daze as if he had just returned to his senses after a trance, but his mind wasn't fully back yet.

Charlotte... seemed to be the most normal of the trio. She wasn't

that different from her usual one, but the way she gazed at Lin Jie seemed to be much more intense now. It was the sort of intensity one had as if they were gazing at god in the flesh.

Alright, that didn't seem very normal, but in contrast to the others, she was the most normal one, just that her sentiments seemed to have gotten stronger...

So why have Greg and Fitch become like this all of a sudden? Lin Jie fell into deep thought.

Could it have been me muttering about the three-second rule utterly shocking these people of the other world? Perhaps they don't have such a thing here?

Considering Greg is a noble who pays attention to exquisiteness and finer side, such an unhygienic practice should be enough to put a look of horror on his face.

Yes, that makes sense.

As for a former drifter like Fitch, surely he must have picked up and consumed food he accidentally dropped out of reluctance. Under normal circumstances, this shouldn't elicit such an excessive reaction from him.

But at the same time, according to Lin Jie's observation during the short time with Fitch, this guy had a really low self-esteem, but he also cared greatly about his reputation. On one hand, he hated the aristocracy, but on the other, he was trying his utmost to integrate into this "high society." Thus, he would never do such a thing in the public eye.

Therefore, with regards to that stunned look, perhaps Fitch never imagined that there would be anyone in this world who could disregard their reputation and do such a thing at such a classy function...

As he rationalized it this way, Lin Jie felt it was rather reasonable.

Um... But wouldn't that make me an embarrassment?!

No, no, that won't do! The image of a great life mentor I've built up all this time would crumble. I've got to stand tall!

Lin Jie covered his mouth and coughed dryly before saying somewhat sheepishly, "I must admit, my actions just now might seem a little unseemly, but there's no need for such a big reaction, right? I was just a little... anxious. After all, every single grain is the result of toil, and it's a shame to waste food."

Boss Lin explained in all earnesty and even made little gestures with his fingers. Then he gazed sincerely at the trio facing him. "Right?"

The shadow behind him also seemed to vaguely turn its head, as if it was also looking over.

Greg shivered. Despite Lin Jie's sincere gaze, he fully felt the threat. It was as if he had just been doused with a bucket of cold water. For the sake of his survival, he immediately calmed his internal chaos down.

The youngster flailed his arms at once and shook his head vigorously. "No, no. You're right. This is... food..." He paused and forced a smile that was uglier than crying. "Respect for food."

He was almost incoherent. "That's right, how can it not be unseemly? It's way too apt! On the contrary, I think those extravagant and wasteful behaviors are what is truly un-seemingly, just like those ostentatious nobles. Paying a great deal of attention to their appearance and dignity but ignoring their moral upbringing. It's really bad!

"There are so many starving people in this world, after all. Though we can't save everyone by ourselves, we at least have to be sentimental and not waste food. That's right, that's it!"

Oh Sacred Light above!

Where did the word 'food' come from!

Ha... Ha ha, to casually evaluate a Supreme-rank that nearly annihilated the manor as mere 'food'... Greg gulped.

It was now that he truly understood why Secret Rite Tower would treat the bookstore and everything related to it with a cautious and somewhat indulgent attitude, even if it was obviously cultivating evil forces.

It totally wasn't a conspiracy as he had guessed. It was entirely because... if they didn't put up with the other party—

—Perhaps all of Norzin would be gone...

Seeing Greg have that 'sudden epiphany,' Lin Jie became relieved. He reached out and patted Greg's shoulder in appreciation. "I didn't expect you to have such a high level of awareness. You really aren't like a typical noble. It's no wonder Joseph took you in as his disciple. He has good foresight."

Greg forced a smile, not even daring to look at the hand on his shoulder. Just the mere thought of Lin Jie using the knife and fork to cut the honey cake made his bladder on the verge of loosening.

He resisted the urge to flee and replied, "You flatter me. It's Teacher who taught me well. I've always admired Sir Joseph's character, so I tried my best to get close to him."

"Haha, I'm not exaggerating. It's rare for someone of your age to care about the disparity in status of different people." Lin Jie then glanced at Fitch again. "As a former drifter, Fitch should have a rather significant understanding of it."

Although he had expectations that his customers would increase consumption of his wares due to competitive relationships, he needed to grasp the range well and not let them be incompatible with each other. He had to seize the opportunity to foster their sense of identity.

"Hmm... Umm?" Fitch was momentarily stunned before he nodded readily. "Mm!"

Lin Jie smiled. "Look, he agrees with you."

Greg glanced at Charlotte's fanatical face on the left and Fitch's stupid face on the right. Thinking about a lively scene where the

three of them engaged in friendly competition made his heart ache.

It's over. I'm the only normal one now.

Chapter 357: Treating Social Phobia

Greg didn't even know how he'd managed to finish his breakfast.

His mind was still in a mess, and it was only when he walked to the manor's garden and saw the boisterous scene of many guests gathered that it hit him—Besides the few of them, who else could have imagined the entire manor nearly being destroyed by a Supreme-rank just a short while ago.

Although everything had returned back to normal, it was probably just a prelude to something that was about to happen...

From past experiences, the reason that this never-before-seen Supreme-rank existence suddenly appeared must have been deliberately set up by the bookstore owner.

He definitely knew that Secret Rite Tower had gotten Greg to watch him and consciously allowed the young apprentice knight to follow him, then he surely knew about this Supreme-rank existence.

So, is this Supreme-rank's identity the key to it all?

All kinds of wild guesses flashed through Greg's mind, but he still couldn't figure out how the appearance of this Supreme-rank existence had anything to do with the bookstore owner's purpose and how it impacted the current situation.

From the look of things, that Supreme-rank creature seemed to be targeting the bookstore owner as Lin Jie was the only opponent in its eyes and it wanted to kill him.

However, this manor was also the second battlefield between Secret Rite Tower and the Corpse Devouring Sect.

Greg himself was Secret Rite Tower's inside man, Charlotte must be Wilde's backup plan, and Fitch was related to the Path of the

Flaming Sword. The bookstore owner that controlled everything via his puppet strings definitely wouldn't let unrelated personnel come in and disturb him from watching the show. So, this being who suddenly appeared must have been...

Wait a minute... Path of the Flaming Sword? Greg suddenly felt as if he'd grasped the looming clue.

Among the few forces in the manor now, Secret Rite Tower was surely the first that could be excluded from having ties with that Supreme-rank. As a new faction, the Corpse Devouring Sect could also be excluded by process of elimination. Moreover, Charlotte had been amongst those affected, so naturally, it was impossible.

The only one left was Fitch that had the Path of the Flaming Sword's marking.

Greg felt like he had an epiphany.

That's right. This is the hint that the bookstore owner placed before us right from the start.

Could it be that... this Supreme-rank existence is the shadow mastermind of the Path of the Flaming Sword that the bookstore had been plotting against?

In other words, the bookstore owner's goal this time round was to lead them into discovering the more obscure side of the Path of the Flaming Sword.

But... why did he let that Supreme-rank go? Given the strength he has displayed, it's impossible for such a let off because of an oversight. Surely he has some other motive for this.

With regards to this, Greg wouldn't be able to figure it out on his own.

Looks like I can only wait till today's banquet ends and find time to give Division Chief Winston a report. I'll use Secret Rite Tower's might to investigate...

Greg's heart was filled with uneasiness as he glanced at Lin Jie, who

was chatting happily with Charlotte and Fitch, and involuntarily shuddered.

There were still many doubts in his heart, but one thing was certain

In a sense, Norzin had just gained three new Supreme-ranks because of the bookstore owner, and each was more dangerous than the last.

This was no longer the eye of the storm but the epicenter of a massive explosion...

A moment of carelessness and Norzin would be destroyed.

The youngster, who had spent the entire night tortured by the immense pressure, felt like crying, but no had no tears. He could only comfort himself that everything was fine and he just needed to get used to it...

“Greg?” Lin Jie’s voice sounded from his side. Greg immediately turned his head and realized that the bookstore owner had ended the conversation with Fitch and Charlotte at some point. Right now, Lin Jie was eyeing with a look that spelled out slight dissatisfaction, so Greg stammered a reply, “Wha... What can I do for you?”

Lin Jie patted his shoulder. “Why are you becoming more and more reserved? Relax a little and interact more with the others. It would be helpful to you, Fitch especially. Your words this morning struck a chord with him and he totally agrees with your opinion.

“He told me just now that the minor dispute you guys had before were all misunderstandings and he feels that you are someone worth befriending.”

Or at least, Fitch immediately nodded when I asked him about that. So, there shouldn't be anything wrong with saying that it came for him, right? Lin Jie thought to himself.

“While the two of you came from different backgrounds but are in sync on some societal concepts, I’m sure you guys can become fast friends. Moreover, it’s precisely because of this that you might be able to understand... something different than what you already

know.”

Greg felt that there was a greater meaning behind those words.

No, this is no longer hinting... He's telling me to ask for information and then report to Secret Rite Tower.

Lin Jie put his arm around Greg's shoulder and pushed the youngster forward. With a smile, he said, “How about I give you a mission?”

Haa, just thinking about how serious this child's social phobia is, makes me feel like I need to help him a little. His previous confrontation with Fitch was also because he isn't the best at expressing himself, right? With such serious social phobia, normal treatment methods won't work, so it's best to use exposure therapy to make him interact with others more.

Noticing Greg looking back at him hesitantly, Lin Jie flashed a smile and waved to express his encouragement.

Greg turned back and looked at Fitch, who had unwittingly recovered from his shell-shocked state. The latter's expression was completely different now, with a look full of fluctuations and a slight hint of emptiness.

He really did not know what to make of the demented experience he had witnessed just now...

Fitch even took the initiative to pour Greg a drink. When he took it, he said, “In your files, I'm just a poor thing who was used as a test subject by the Path of the Flaming Sword, right?”

“!” Greg looked up sharply. *How did this guy know...*

Fitch shrugged nonchalantly and revealed a strange grin. “I roughly know why, but it's hard to explain it clearly to you... It's rather complicated, but in short, because of my ability, my sensitivity is higher than that of an ordinary transcendent being. Therefore, when I looked directly at the ‘it,’ I was directly drawn into the thoughts of that Supreme-rank.”

Greg seemed to understand a little. “So?”

Fitch lowered his voice and muttered, “That Supreme-rank is very special... Her main body exists in a four-dimensional space, and her cerebration isn’t of a certain point of time but across the entire timeline of which it exists. Thus, I was able to see all its thoughts and related memories.

“It also includes some things about the Path of the Flaming Sword, Secret Rite Tower, and the plan that involves me.

“So, ask whatever you want to ask.” Fitch shrugged. “After all—”

Fitch clinked his glass against Greg’s, the back of his bare hand appearing as translucent as brilliant glass for a moment under the sunlight. “This is a task given to you by the Lord.”

While Lin Jie and his customers were chatting happily, Haniel, who was fleeing for her life, was shrunk away in a certain timeline.

Having lost nearly all power, she could no longer maintain her human form mimicry and had instead returned to her butterfly-like form made up of countless threads of light. Moreover, her body was constantly showing signs of dissipation, flickering occasionally as if she was a broadcast hit by a signal disruption and occasionally causing a few translucent bugs to fall off her.

Panicking and having lost her rationality from escape in the rivers of time, she could only wail. “My... My power... Give it back to me... Give it back!”

Suddenly, she sensed that power of hers which she originally possessed and leaped toward it delightfully, as if it were the light of a beckoning.

Chapter 358: How A Sorceress Was Raised

Observing the nearby Fitch and Greg chatting happily made Lin Jie nod in satisfaction.

Being able to communicate harmoniously was the beginning of breaking the ice. Lin Jie believed that as long as Greg got to interact more with others, he would gradually overcome those psychological problems and resolve his social phobia that made him nervous and unable to communicate properly.

You're welcome!

As the gift presentation segment was scheduled for noon, the time now was meant for guests to mingle.

However, Lin Jie didn't know anyone at the banquet and so wasn't able to integrate with the crowd. Moreover, there were three ready-made customers before him, thus he naturally had to take care of them first.

Value customer quality over quantity.

Lin Jie had fully understood this from his experience running the bookstore over the past few years. A customer of quality could solve most problems, and the complementarity between fellow customers could aid in them having a better impression of the bookstore.

And especially since Greg and Charlotte were close to Joseph and Old Wil, consolidating his relationship with them would definitely bring Lin Jie quicker benefits.

Of course, there were quite a lot of other guests stealing glances at Lin Jie as if they were itching to approach and talk with him. However, it seemed that they were rather hesitant due to witnessing the previous night's interaction with Ji Zhixiu. These customers appeared like they were struggling internally for a bit before

choosing to give up in the end. Lin Jie couldn't solicit these new potential customers even if he wanted to.

Haa... Looks like I was overly optimistic. It's really too unrealistic to gain a large bunch of customers right away. But that's fine. At least, the interests of these people are piqued and would act as a base for when the cooperative announcement is made later, thought Lin Jie to himself before he turned to the submissive Charlotte in front of him.

This new assistant of Old Wil's could also, in a sense, be considered a partial student of his. From her appearance alone, she was indeed a cold beauty befitting the demeanor of a noble.

Compared to Ji Zhixiu's intense beauty akin to a rose, Charlotte was more like a delicate and slender water lotus. She had slightly long light golden hair with tinges of white and eyes that were the faint blue of a lake with a layer of frost covering them.

As if she was made to be a noble, the luxurious and exquisite white dress suited her perfectly as she sat regally in a velvet high-backed chair and had a reserved smile that was somewhat distant.

No wonder...

Now that Lin Jie looked at it, while the way Ji Zhixiu behaved was in line with the etiquette of nobility, she really didn't look like a member of the upper class at all.

Greg had said the Ji Family were descendants of wanderers from the Northern Lands, while Rolle Resource was merely a tool for excavation. The iconic black hair and unique name structure of the Jis also seemed out of place and it appeared to be one of the reasons why they couldn't completely integrate.

—Lin Jie's pure black hair and pupils were also very rare in Norzin, so he was made a 'Northland-ers' when Cherry had helped him forge an identity back then.

Although the Ji Family was already standing at the top of the social pyramid of wealth and power, it was only because of their status that they were sought after. Moreover, such status might actually

not be that useful.

There were probably many others who were like John from last night...

Lin Jie rubbed his chin and thought to himself that even though Rolle Resource was a mountain that stood tall, the Ji Family that were helming it had their own fair share of problems.

Since Lin Jie was now a cooperative partner, he felt that he needed to provide a little help, even if it was insignificant.

Greg's family seemed to be influential, but he didn't seem too interested in the Ji Family and perhaps even felt a little disgusted. However, judging from those people that were surrounding Charlotte earlier in the morning, the young lady's family appeared to have some status or was relatively reputable among nobles.

Since those others were only hesitating and stuck to observing, Lin Jie felt that he could perhaps rope Charlotte in to provide them a reference.

"Ahem..." Lin Jie covered his mouth and cleared his throat to get the young lady's attention. "By the way, Charlotte, what sort of books do you normally read?"

When Charlotte heard this, she immediately replied in all earnesty, "I read your work three times daily, both in the day and at night without skipping a single word and memorizing it all in my heart. I hope that I will one day take another step toward reaching your level of unfathomable wisdom."

"..."

Hey now, why does it feel like you are bragging even harder than Old Wil? At the very least, Old Wil is just exaggerating. Why does it sound like you intend to treat my book as a holy scripture?

Lin Jie gave a dry laugh. "Ha-ha-ha, no need to make it up to be some sort of religious rite. There's no need to read it everyday.

"In fact, for things like knowledge and wisdom, it is something that

needs to be learned. Purely just reading it multiple times won't grant you a deeper understanding. Studying blindly is not very useful, and you have got to understand and put it into practice yourself.

"I think, instead of reading it three times a day, why don't you try to study some of the topics? There are certain things that you can only gain a deeper understanding of if you try it yourself."

Charlotte's eyes widened. "Topic?"

Lin Jie gazed at her eyes that were brimming with curiosity, and the sensation of being a teacher returned to him. He reached out and patted her head and said with a kind smile, "Yes, decide on a direction in which you want to study, formulate a research idea and method, and find the materials you need, whether written or physical. It's best to ask the relevant people on the ground and get first-hand information from their mouths. This way, all-round verification is the most reliable."

Charlotte mused, "Their mouths..."

"Mm." Lin Jie nodded. "This is what humanities is all about. It's closely related to people's thoughts, culture, and even their souls, so we have to start with people. To put it in a more graphic way, we have to dig out the things in other people's brains and make them our own. We can't just take these things but learn how to digest them."

Charlotte completely understood. "Dig it out... and digest it!"

Boss Lin loved students who were serious when it came to studying, and his smile got wider. Patiently guiding her on, he said, "Besides... How can you improve just by reading a book all the time? We have to set our sights a little further."

Charlotte drew an inference from the analogy. "That's why I have to read even more books."

Nice!

It had been quite some time since Lin Jie had met a student with

such awareness. With a beaming smile, he fished out a book from behind him and said, “However, you don’t have to blindly pursue more. Reading my book at this stage of your learning journey is more than enough. Also, you should learn to balance work and rest. Only then would you develop in more aspects.

“Here, this book is very suitable for a young lady like you.” He reached out and handed over ***Pride and Prejudice*** , one of the trial books he had brought over this time.

This is... a divine bestowment! Charlotte couldn’t help but hold her breath, using her utmost restraint to stop herself from prostrating on the floor like the most devoted of fanatics. She lowered her head and took the book with trembling hands, the fanaticism in her eyes nearly turned into material light, making that layer of frost turn into tears.

Chapter 359: Original Sin And Heart's Demons

To Charlotte, or perhaps all those at Blood Feast that were caught by Wilde and forced to read the book *Corpse Devouring Sect, Rites & Ceremonies* , Lin Jie, who had given this book, was a true god.

Whether he was the author, or propagator of this book, whether he was truly a god, or merely herald of one, it didn't matter to them because God was before them and that was enough.

Therefore, in Charlotte's opinion, that scene from earlier which could tear apart any ordinary transcendent being's understanding of the world was merely just the arrival of God once again. It had all just been a casual display of God's power, and she shouldn't be shocked but should only be in praise and adulation.

And now, after having previously let them see God's book, another book of immense power and destiny had appeared in front of her.

"Divine Bestowment," "God's Grace," "God's Miracle," regardless of what words were used to it—this was proof that she had obtained God's favor and the right to be recognized as a believer.

The burning fanaticism inside of Charlotte's heart was like a lit torch, as if every single beat of her heart was for the existence before her.

Her hand holding onto the book didn't tremble at all because this was a gift from God. Regardless of how excited she was, she could not profane the book in any way and should accept it in the most solemn manner.

Original Sin & Heart's Demons ... Charlotte silently recited the title of the book and reached out to touch the dark red book cover.

The swirling patterns on the cover of the book seemed to be a kind of flower that she had never seen before. Blood vessel-like black

branches extended from the flower, and when Charlotte brushed her hand over it, these branches even seemed to pulsate ever so slightly.

This book was like a piece of flesh that had been gouged out from somewhere and wrapped in blood vessels.

Thump, thump, thump...

Charlotte heard her heartbeat and the branches she was feeling with her fingers pulse at a similar frequency. As time passed, it felt as if the two were gradually synchronizing.

A voice that she had never heard before resounded within her. It called itself a long dead vengeful spirit, an existence called the Witch of Original Sin...

“This is one of the trial books I originally planned to let Rolle Resources sell on my behalf, but I think it suits you very well. Anyway, since they are helping me to sell, I believe Miss Ji won’t have any objections to me giving up this one to you.” Lin Jie began to promote his book as usual. “What sort of books do you usually read, Charlotte? Have you read any romance novels?”

While Charlotte might be an aristocrat, she certainly didn’t spend every single day of her life socializing and would naturally do other stuff for entertainment in her spare time. At the very least, she would definitely read popular novels or watch romantic dramas.

Or rather, according to some market research previously done by Lin Jie to sell his books, it seemed to be quite popular among the nobles to read such light books. Young ladies of Charlotte’s age should likely be the largest audience for this kind of book.

However, Lin Jie couldn’t be certain she wasn’t the type of obedient child that did nothing but study seriously all the time. Thus, Lin Jie still gave some ambiguous explanations and also asked such a question.

Fortunately, Charlotte wasn’t that abnormal. Although she didn’t know why Boss Lin would mention all this, the blonde girl returned

to her senses and nodded before answering truthfully, "As it is required for me to interact with other women, I've read a few books to seek out common topics, but I'm not very interested in all these."

A serious look came on Lin Jie's face as he said, "It's good if all these don't interest you! There's not much value in reading these meaningless books, and there's no need for you to cater to others. I can tell that you're a very opinionated girl and unwilling to just be a flower vase."

He did a quick glance at all the glamorously dressed women who were mere empty vessels before lowering his voice. "Just like them, living a mediocre life surrounded by beauty. This isn't what you want, right?"

In fact, Charlotte, who was from a noble family of significant status, going to work as an assistant for a poor and unknown scholar like Old Wil showed how rebellious she was with regards to her original life.

Moreover, she later learned a rather unpopular subject, folklore, from Lin Jie. This alone showed that she had a pure desire for knowledge.

If Lin Jie wanted to impress his customers, he needed to strike a chord with what was in their hearts.

Charlotte was indeed moved. Her original, respectful, and glamorous demeanor was just like a mask. Though her feelings were deep and passionate, she was like a sunflower, always facing the sun in order to pursue the necessary conditions for her survival.

Yet, at this moment, that mask shattered. She lowered her head, and there was a gentler light in her eyes, like a flower yearning for the breeze.

"Yes, I don't like such a boring and mundane life, faking smiles and saying similar things to everyone who doesn't appear to be any different. Catering to them is just like putting on a performance. I'm tired of living the same life day after day. I don't want to be like them. I want to be what I want to be!"

This was why she became a black magician and joined Blood Feast.

She didn't have to smile, she didn't have to follow etiquette, and she didn't have to try her best to put up with people she didn't like...

Killing, living on the fringes between life and death, exciting enemies, preying on the weak, devouring others with sinister and cunning schemes; this was the life she wanted.

Sometimes, the human by the name of Charlotte would feel that she was just an evil spirit in human skin. Only when she was in the persona of 'Snowflake' would she feel like her true self.

However, she could not completely abandon her secular identity because she wasn't strong enough. Moreover, the support of her family's financial and material resources were very important to her.

Lin Jie smiled and patted her head. "Your way of thinking isn't bad. Every single person wears a mask. Some grow prideful when they are trapped in their tall ivory towers, while others who are narrow-minded and obstinate become prejudiced. Only by breaking all these can they pursue their true selves."

"These... are the original sins?" asked Charlotte.

Lin Jie was momentarily stunned, then nodded. "That's right. Pride and prejudice, or other desires born of the human heart, are the original sins that accompany wisdom in the human heart.

"It is unavoidable, and it also means that what others see may never be the real you. However, you must be clear about your thoughts and understand yourself well so that you can't be swayed by others. Otherwise, your own heart might be deceived."

Lin Jie winked at Charlotte. "But these phenomena are also really worth studying and are closely related to the customs of the lives of people. If you are willing, try finding some people to practice the methods I just mentioned and study why people have such sentiments. Like you just said... dig it out, and digest it."

So her duty from now on was to dig out the ‘original sins’ in the hearts of those people and eat them?

Charlotte stared at the throbbing patterns on the book that vaguely transformed into the image of a blurred woman’s face. Having heard the acknowledgment, she nodded excitedly. “Mm, I will.”

The young lady held the book close and listened attentively. Enjoying this very much, Lin Jie continued, “Feel free to ask me if there’s anything you don’t understand during the process.”

“Understood,” replied Charlotte.

Lin Jie was rather pleased with his efficiency at promoting his books. He patted Charlotte on the shoulder and was about to go get a drink when a servant made an announcement.

The morning event had concluded and it was time for lunch. This time, it would be on the first floor of another villa in the manor.

Most importantly, it was time for the birthday gifts to be presented.

Chapter 360: Are You Jealous Of Me?

“Seems like good times are always so short. Well, it’s time for lunch,” said Lin Jie as he put down his drink regrettably.

He was still hoping to continue his ‘Chicken Soup for the Soul’ project, but didn’t expect that just these three potential customers would take up the entire morning.

Though, such happy days were rarely seen in the bookstore. This made Lin Jie feel that he had made the right choice to come to this banquet.

“Alright, time to deliver the present first.”

Lin Jie turned around and called for Fitch and Greg to come along to the venue for lunch.

It had to be said that rich people really used the words luxury and enjoyment to the extreme.

The constructs within the manor were well-arranged and interspersed with man-made exquisite landscapes so that the guests who went back and forth between the villas would not find it boring.

Although it was quite tiring to have to walk around the huge manor, perhaps this was the price of socializing with the upper class.

Haa... this rare snow-scape is a sight worth admiring, making being a little tired worth it, thought Lin Jie to himself as he headed along in good spirits.

He reached out and grabbed some falling snowflakes as he looked up at the somewhat gray sky... The white snowfall was now so thick that he had to hold an umbrella, with flowing traces from the

thick clouds as if a snowstorm was brewing in the distance.

As a man-made city, Norzin had very few climate fluctuations due to its high altitude above ground level and the partial temperature regulator built within the sewer network.

At least in the past three years, Lin Jie hadn't really seen snow, just some slight graupel in one year... He had wondered if snow even existed in this other world.

Lin Jie couldn't help but think about the continuous heavy rain from a few months back and wondered if the snowfall was a result of the rain's aftermath.

"Charlotte?" A female voice suddenly came from the side.

Lin Jie turned his head and noticed a young lady in a gown approaching Charlotte. With a polite and warm smile, she said, "Charlotte, it's really you. I didn't expect to see you here. I heard that you were almost grounded because you were hanging out with some unknown people recently. When I didn't see you at the opening ball yesterday, I thought I wouldn't see you at this banquet.

"I immediately came over when I heard that people had seen you here. It's great that you're alright..."

The young lady in the gown clasped her hand together and tilted her head to the side as if feeling relieved at her friend being fine. Then, she turned toward Lin Jie beside them and asked, "This is?"

Oh... It looks like her objective is actually for me? Lin Jie rubbed his chin and smiled without saying a word.

While he, too, was putting on the same professional smile she had, this young lady was obviously being too deliberate and crass. She had come up to Charlotte in the name of concern, but before her good friend even responded, she was now asking about the identity of the stranger beside her.

Isn't the amount of concern and worry shown here way too short for someone who's supposedly a good friend? However, even though Lin Jie couldn't help but quibble in his heart, the other party seemed to

be an acquaintance of Charlotte after all, and it wouldn't be polite for him to speak.

Better let the young ladies solve it themselves.

Having received Lin Jie's encouraging gaze of acquiescence, Charlotte restrained the look of admiration toward Lin Jie. Even the distant smile she usually had when talking to others was gone. Instead, with a face devoid of expression, she replied, "This has nothing to do with you, Danae."

Charlotte understood what Boss Lin meant. When she had accepted this book, the first thing she needed to do was to find someone to practice on once she decided on the study topic.

That's right, this must surely be Boss Lin's arrangement.

This young lady aristocrat before her was the 'best' friend when she was the Charlotte of the past. In the eyes of anyone who knew them, the two girls had a very good relationship, but... deep down, the two of them knew very well that they were just using each other.

Despite being an ice-cold beauty, Charlotte was able to still get on well within her social circle. Of course, this wasn't just solely because of her appearance. While cold, she wasn't withdrawn, and it was her 'good friend,' Danae, whom she showed it to.

As long as Charlotte could be 'thawed,' it meant she could engage in normal communication and show off a 'cuteness' unlike her usual appearance. At the same time, there wasn't a need to ruin her original image.

As for Danae, the fact that cold beauty Charlotte was her best friend was used to highlight her kindness and virtues that could even move this 'glacier.'

Such a combination was most interesting and naturally supplemented the duo's reputation. However, it was so hypocritical, boring, and deliberate. Everyone was merely dancing in their trap.

But it's different now. I don't have to pretend any longer... I can be

myself as long as I'm strong enough.

Charlotte could feel that book hugged to her chest resonating with her sentiments. It was pulsating hard, causing her brain to be clearer and more excited than ever. This would be the first step for her to completely break free from this shell...

Danae stiffened up momentarily, but she quickly recovered and responded gently, "How can you say that it has nothing to do with me? I'm your best friend... I'm just concerned about you and want to know who you've gotten to know recently, that's all."

Tsk tsk, I can smell the fake-ness from here... Lin Jie thought to himself with relish. He had a premonition that this would be a scene where the friendship between the fake sisters would come crumbling down like a house of cards.

But it wasn't a good thing for a talented and ambitious young lady like Charlotte to get stuck in such a dilemma. The right path was to get out of this predicament as soon as possible, and she needed strong medicine to quickly cut this Gordian knot.

Charlotte turned to Lin Jie and said respectfully, "I'm very sorry for wasting your time. I can resolve this on my own."

Lin Jie gave Charlotte a pat on the shoulder. Although he very much wanted to see this prime-time drama plot-line unfold, he could tell that Charlotte didn't want others privy to her private matters. Thus, he said, "Do you want me to help bring your gift over?"

Charlotte shook her head. "I've already asked my servant to send it."

Lin Jie nodded and smiled. "Do you remember all that I said during our talk just now?"

Charlotte's eyes met Lin Jie's as she recited, "Pride and prejudice, or other desires born of the human heart, are the original sins that accompany wisdom in the human heart."

"In the eyes of others, I will never be the real me. I need to

recognize myself, maintain myself, find my true self, and... dig out those original sins, digest them, and supplement myself.”

Lin Jie nodded in satisfaction. “It looks like you understand very well. This is the study topic that you have to focus on in the future. I hope you can achieve something and hopefully break free from your shackles... Hmm, it’s about time. I’ll go see Miss Ji first.”

Charlotte nodded and watched Lin Jie head off first.

At first, Danae felt rather uneasy hearing their exchange, but when she saw the person she wanted to interact leave, she panicked and wanted to go forward and stop him.

Charlotte took two steps forward and pressed herself against the girl’s face, looking into her eyes and whispering, “Danae, are you... jealous of me? Jealous that I’m once again one step ahead of you and have found someone even more mysterious and influential while you can only watch from the sidelines forever?”

Danae’s face was twisted with fury for a second, but just as he composed herself and forced a gentle smile, she felt a sharp pain in her heart.

“You...”

Her eyes widened, and she glanced down to discover that the book in Charlotte’s arms had turned into a strange mass of flesh and blood. Fibrous roots had pierced deeply into the center of Charlotte’s body, and a mouth lined up with sharp teeth cracked open in the center.

A thick, forked tongue protruded from mouth and passed through Danae’s heart, stirring up the insides, as if it was trying to dig out something...

Chapter 361: Answer Handed In To Boss Lin

The bloodied flesh from the book instantly became a part of Charlotte, becoming more compatible with her excitement and desire as the pulsating gradually became in sync with her heartbeat.

At the point where the thick, scary tongue stabbed into Danae's chest, Charlotte took the opportunity to go closer and hug the latter.

Their bodies were pressed tightly together, just like an embrace, so it didn't seem out of the ordinary in any way.

"Danae, are you jealous of me?" Charlot pressed her face tightly against Danae's, now no longer having any of the natural elegance and alienation of a noble. Her eyes were condescending and extremely cold, filled with a pure unadorned malice.

"Jealous that I have better looks and a better family background; jealous that I'm more popular than you even if I don't try; jealous that I can easily become the center of attention... Am I right?"

This was the murderous desire Charlotte had always kept under wraps in the past. Now, it was being completely revealed, just as if she was a shark that had opened its jaws, baring rows after rows of razor sharp teeth.

It didn't seem like she was looking at a person, but rather, ravenously eyeing a delicious dish.

In the face of such a terrifying gaze, even ordinary transcendent beings would feel their legs go weak, let alone Danae, who was just an ordinary person.

Moreover, at this very moment, Danae didn't just feel like she was prey exposed to the sharp teeth of a predator, but her body experienced it as well...

“Gu...gu...Gurk...” Danae’s eyes were wide open as a vague and weak sound came from her mouth. Using her last bit of survival instinct, she raised a trembling hand in a bid to push Charlotte away.

With a heaving chest, she panted hard, but more escaped than she could take in, and she couldn’t even make a complete sound.

Or rather... She could see a certain snaking object coming out from her opened mouth.

The conclusion she had was that the tongue inserted into her chest had already drilled out her throat and twisted her vocal cords so she couldn’t even make a squeak.

Charlotte wasn’t bothered about Danae’s resistance. She reached out to grab the flimsy hand, placing it on her own cheek as she inched her face closer. “Why? Does it hurt?”

Danae’s trembling got harder and she wanted to shake her head. However, Charlotte was using great force to restrict her, making her unable to even move.

Taking a deep breath, Charlotte realized that most of the crowd headed to the lunch venue were already gone. She leaned back slightly, and half of the bloody flesh mouth that had formed on her chest was partially revealed. She could also clearly see the hole gnawed into Danae at the corresponding spot of her torso that was glistening with sticky blood and flesh residue.

Only bits of some internal organs left inside. That tongue was like a blood vessel, snaking all the way from the larynx to the inside of Danae’s head and was still stirring.

Danae’s eyes were rolled back into her head, and some saliva dripped from the corner of her mouth. There were some loose skin wrinkles and a brackish color under her eyes, as if her eyeballs had separated from her flesh...

Charlotte licked her lips, revealing the faintly discernible incantation on the base of her tongue. Breaking into her satisfied

smile, she whispered, “Hush~ No need to speak. I’ve already heard your thoughts.”

From the surface, the two looked like they were as close as sisters. People passing by would only raise a slight eyebrow as they hurried on, without noticing anything amiss.

In truth... The two of them had truly achieved an extreme level of closeness.

“You actually couldn’t stand it since long ago. Giving your all to exhibit your good side and build friendly relationships with everyone. Yet, why does it seem that everyone only notices Charlotte first when you are with her?

“...She’s clearly so cold and simply doesn’t bother, yet why are all these people so cheap and enthusiastic about sticking to her?

“...Whereas I can only put aside my dissatisfaction and pretend that others can get along well with this good sister of mine... Jealousy is a weed, sprouting crazily as long as the wind blows.”

Charlotte gently reached her hands out and considerably pulled the two sides of the gaping hole on Danae’s torso together, as if worried this good sister of hers would catch a cold.

As the skin and ribs in her chest had also disappeared, this forceful pulling made the originally graceful young aristocrat become extremely slender in a strange way.

This action caused Danae’s body to spasm violently again. A tear fell from the corner of her eye, which meant that her consciousness had not dissipated.

“So, you decided to destroy this person who made you crazy with jealousy.

“How should it be done? Not just any ordinary party can be entrusted with this. Her family’s background is on par or even greater than yours, and it would definitely be discovered.

“Therefore, a better idea would be to get the help of a mysterious

organization you came into contact with recently—Blood Feast.

“While there had been some recent changes to the upper echelons of that organization, it still didn’t affect the overall plan due to its unique and scattered structure. New transcendent beings appeared and took over all the organization’s leadership, turning that somewhat disjointed and crumbling organization into a considerable force.

“It should be surefire for such an organization to destroy an ordinary young noble lady. Or so you thought, when you gave this mission to them.

“But why?

“Why did Charlotte, who should have disappeared and died an unnatural death last night, appear at the current banquet?”

She had been so happy yesterday when Charlotte hadn’t shown up...

But in the end, besides just showing up, Charlotte had been chatting happily with the mysterious man that had stolen the limelight of the previous night’s banquet, once again stealing the attention from Danae once more.

The last bit of light gathered in Danae’s eyes as she looked unwillingly at the young lady before her, her fingers closing around Charlotte’s hand as tightly as she could as if asking—Why?

Charlotte sighed. “Even without the research topic set up by Boss Lin, I had already long discovered your plan. It’s just that I didn’t want to bother about it at first, so I pretended it never happened. After all, I needed your help to integrate into social circles.

“But now, I think Boss Lin is right. I should face my true self. As long as I’m strong enough, these things are just a burden. Socializing is useless to me,” muttered Charlotte softly.

Danae trembled even more violently, panting hard as her pupils constricted.

“Hmm... You want to know why I knew what your plans were?”

Charlotte revealed a truly delighted grin. “Because the transcendent being that took over Blood Feast—

“—was me.”

Danae was stunned, her eyes nearly popping out from their sockets. Using her last ounce of strength, she struggled, trying to raise her hand to grab Charlotte. However, her hand only raised halfway before it fell limp.

Charlotte retracted her smile and glanced coldly at Danae, who had died with her eyes wide open. She felt that she had become one with the book titled ***Original Sins and Heart's Demons***, the beating of her heart completely in sync with the book.

“So this is how it is. This is... the ‘Heart’s Demon,’ a demon that devours the seven cardinal sins.”

That would be the answer she would hand in to Boss Lin.

Chapter 362: Such An Organization

The villa used for lunch and the presentation of birthday gifts was ridiculously large. The doors were wide open, and the first-floor hall was set up like the usual banquet for guests to eat and mingle.

Although he had only been here a day, Lin Jie was already familiar with the process and was starting to feel a little bored.

After all, there was only one thing to do, and that was to mingle, mingle, and mingle. He could easily imagine the same things repeating over and over for the next three days.

Even if Lin Jie's mouth was his livelihood and he was usually willing to talk, it didn't mean he was willing to slog away nonstop for three days.

Most of these exchanges were ineffective and filled with all sorts of lengthy diplomatic rhetoric. Hearing this over and over could make one's head swell.

Moreover, from the current look of things, it would take some time for these people to overcome the trauma from the previous day and take the initiative to seek him out... Lin Jie himself couldn't guess how long that would take.

Fortunately, there was still delicious food and three new customers to help Boss Lin tide over the boredom.

That had been what Lin Jie originally thought. He had already been ready to welcome the meaningless chatter and dazzling array of delicacies the moment he stepped through the doors.

"Venerable Mr. Lin, hello. Please wait a moment." An elderly man with a head full of white standing by the door bowed and extended his hand respectfully to intercept Lin Jie. The old man was decked out in a brown vest over a white shirt and wore a pair of gold-

rimmed glasses.

Lin Jie stopped. He knew this face, for it belonged to the elderly butler of A16 Manor. During the previous events, Lin Jie could always see the elderly butler directing the other servants throughout.

Lin Jie asked politely, “Ahh, it’s the butler. Is there anything I can help you with?”

The elderly butler broke out in cold sweat when he noticed Lin Jie’s slight smile. “No, no, I wouldn’t dare to trouble you. It’s just that the young miss has instructed me to lead you to the side hall if I see you. She hopes to be able to have you join her for lunch.”

“Oh...” Lin Jie realized that Young Miss Ji had sent someone to wait for him here.

Perhaps she had also considered the fact that I would feel bored... Haa, how thoughtful. It was a stark contrast to the Young Miss Ji in Lin Jie’s impression that got rid of all the scumbags that wronged her.

“That’s really considerate.” Lin Jie nodded. “Since it’s Miss Ji’s invitation, of course I’ll have to come along.”

The old butler made an inviting gesture and pointed to the other corridor. “This way, please. I’ll lead the way for you—uh, but those few with you...”

Lin Jie noticed the troubled look on the elderly butler’s face and reckoned that perhaps Miss Ji might tell him some more private things, such as the previous hurt she suffered because of scumbags that jilted her. If that were so, it might indeed be inappropriate for others to be present.

So he turned around and said, “The two of you stay here for now. It would be awkward if Charlotte comes back later and can’t find any of us. You guys wait for her and have a good chat later.”

Greg and Fitch exchanged glances. Even if they were unwilling, they were in no position to decline and could only agree.

“Have a good lunch and remember to send my regards to Charlotte.” The smiling Lin Jie waved at them as they entered the hall. He reckoned that it was a good idea to let those two talk. It had only been a short while, but they were already getting along so well. With that out of the way, he returned his attention to the butler and said, “Thank you.”

The elderly butler wiped away the sweat on his forehead and hurriedly replied, “It’s no trouble. No trouble at all. It’s my honor to be at your service.”

With that, he lowered his head and led the way, leading Lin Jie along the corridor to the side hall on the ground floor of the villa.

Not long after Lin Jie left.

Greg and Fitch entered the hall, but they didn’t move with the crowd, instead choosing to find seats nearest to the doorway.

They had no intention of chatting with others after all. Boss Lin had asked them to wait for Charlotte, so they had naturally chosen the most suitable location where Charlotte would see them immediately.

However, the two didn’t speak much after taking their seats as they had already finished exchanging information earlier in the morning. The two of them still disliked each other, and if it wasn’t for the tit-for-tat confrontational exchange early, they had nothing else to talk about.

Greg set up a small magic barrier before taking out his communications device to start reporting the current situation to Secret Rite Tower.

“What? A never-before-documented Supreme-rank?! Are you certain the report is accurate?! We didn’t notice any abnormalities, nor did the Truth Union’s aether surveillance detect any fluctuations...”

Winston’s reaction of shock was roughly what Greg had anticipated. It was rather similar to his own reaction back then.

“I’m certain it’s true, and you can only choose to believe it. I saw it

all with my own eyes, and there were two other witnesses as well. The reason you all are unable to observe or track her is because she has mastery over the law of time and instantly reversed time, returning everything back to the original point.

“Other than those who experienced all of it personally, everyone else has already lost their relevant memories over time.

“Aside from that, the person I asked for your help to investigate last night, Fitch, a test subject of the Path of the Flaming Sword, obtained some very important information via Boss Lin’s intervention...”

“Fitch?”

“Yeah, it roughly goes like this...” Greg told him about Fitch’s accidental acquisition of a part of the Supreme-rank’s memories as well as the information he got from Fitch. “There are a total of ten Supreme-rank leaders in the Path of the Fire Sword. However, these leaders don’t have a comprehensive cooperative relationship with one another, possibly even being unaware of the existence of the others, which is why we haven’t been able to find their origins. These ten Supreme-ranks use the code-names of ‘Angels’ respectively... And the names of these ‘Angels’ originate from a book from the Lower District. Moreover, what they control is far more than we’ve investigated...”

Winston’s tone got more solemn. “Go on.”

Greg continued, “We haven’t been able to find out all this time, but the ones that gave the elixir to Fitch are the Dark Elf elders who control the Ash Chamber of Commerce.”

“Impossible!” Winston couldn’t help blurting out. “The Ash Chamber of Commerce was also a target of the Path of Flaming Sword from the internal conflict between Cherry and Congreve previously... If their elders were already in cahoots with the Path of the Flaming Sword, why would they need to nurture a mole?”

Greg shook his head. “Captain, you’ve forgotten what I just said—the Path of the Flaming Sword doesn’t have a comprehensive

cooperative relationship between their leaders, possibly being unaware of each other's existence."

Winston found this to be rather ridiculous. "You mean... one of those Path of the Flaming Sword 'Angels' controls the Ash Chamber of Commerce, and it was another one that tried to infiltrate and instigate Congreve's defection?"

"Damn, what is this..."

How could there be such an 'organization' in the world?

Chapter 363: Inseparable

An organization that suffered from internal strife due to the lack of internal communication was ridiculous to the extremes, as if it was a joke.

But what made it even more absurd for Winston was the fact that this unbelievably shambolic organization had rendered Secret Rite Tower's investigations fruitless for several months...

However, if Greg's information was true and this organization was led by ten Supreme-ranks, then things seemed to make sense.

From the point of view of these Supreme-ranks, this organization might be a joke, or perhaps a game.

They themselves were the true Path of the Flaming Sword.

Greg lowered his voice. "That's the truth. This is all the information I've gathered so far and I hope it can be of use."

Winston was silent for quite some time before he eventually said, "I'll get someone to investigate as soon as possible."

Greg nodded an acknowledgment before asking, "Teacher... How's his situation?"

Winston replied, "It's still fine. I mean, the situation hasn't continued to deteriorate at the very least. He'll definitely buy as much time as possible, but..."

Greg inhaled sharply. "I got it."

He didn't continue to probe because he trusted his teacher.

Joseph must have been doing his best to stop Wilde, so all that was required of the others was to do their jobs as best they could.

He hung up the communications device while his mind was in a mess as he thought about Lin Jie, who was planning something with

Rolle Resource.

At this moment, the crisp clacking of heels on ground sounded from the side, interrupting his chain of thoughts. Frowning, Greg turned in its direction—

Charlotte was walking over, with the book given by Mr. Lin in her arms. The book was squeezed tightly to the chest, so close to her that it gave an illusion that it was a part of her.

“Sorry for the delay,” said Charlotte with a smile as she gracefully took a seat beside Greg.

Greg impassively observed the smiling Charlotte. For some reason, goosebumps broke out all over his body when she sat down.

This feeling... was as if there was a dream beast sitting next to him. This clearly hadn't happened previously.

Fitch stared straight at Charlotte's chest—in what seemed like a rather rude and indecent manner. If the nobles beside noticed it, they would have definitely reprimanded him. But he was in fact staring at the book which seemed to have turned a tad redder...

His eyes went up as he made eye contact with the young aristocratic lady. Then, the two of them had a strange understanding. Fitch raised the cup in his hand slightly in greeting, and Charlotte returned a smile and nodded.

“Where's your good friend Danae?” asked Greg.

Charlotte replied with a slight grin, “Oh, you mean her... I imparted some of Mr. Lin's teachings to her.

“In the past, we were friends on the surface, but there existed a deep estrangement in our hearts. We both learned how to be hypocritical in the filthy torrent of humans... These things made it impossible for us to communicate sincerely with each other.”

Then, Charlotte's smile became even sweeter and innocent, just like Danae's. “However, I have to thank Mr. Lin. It was his words that enlightened Danae. Now, we are truly inseparable.

“My growth is her growth...”

Charlot smiled as blood seeped out of the smooth pinkish skin of her face. Then, white flesh seemed to sprout from this blood, slowly growing to the familiar and small face of a young woman—

The woman had no pupils, and her eyeball was completely white. Her mouth opened and closed painfully, like a fish struggling for survival, mirroring Charlotte’s pious and beautiful smile.

Greg: “...”

Fitch: “...”

“What’s wrong with you guys?” Charlotte eyed the two before her in bafflement before realizing what it was. She frowned before giving an apologetic smile. “Oh, my apologies.”

She nonchalantly raised her slender hand wrapped in white lace gloves and pressed her face back down.

Greg had broken out in cold sweat once more as he gulped and tried to change the subject, “Boss Lin told us to send his regards... Have a good lunch.”

“Heh.” Charlot stroked her cheek with one hand while still pressing the book tightly to her chest with the other. Smiling blissfully, she said, “Thank you for your regards, Mr. Lin. It’s indeed... very pleasant.”

Lin Jie walked along the winding corridor. He could see the guests inside the main hall via the corridor’s windows and couldn’t help but count them out of boredom.

One customer, two customers, three...

Eventually, he arrived at the side hall bathed in a warm yellow glow from the skylight. Lin Jie gazed up to find that the ceiling of this room was carved from transparent crystal. Even the thick fur of the carpet beneath his feet felt as soft as clouds. It was evident that the items in this room were priceless.

Just the thought of his own dilapidated house filled with books made Lin Jie's heart feel heavy, and he could only lament in silence.

...This business partnership would definitely be split 90 to 10!

"You've arrived, Mr. Lin." Ji Zhixiu had been waiting in this room and quickly stood up respectfully.

Ji Zhixiu, who was always so calm and decisive regardless of whatever the situation, had no way of maintaining her dignity in front of Lin Jie. She took a breath, trying to settle her wildly pounding heart. Even if she had met Boss Lin multiple times already, she couldn't help but feel in awe and frightened of Lin Jie's greatness each time.

She recalled the scene she had witnessed earlier. The Supreme-rank that controlled time was merely like a slice of honey cake before Lin Jie.

Lin Jie eyed Miss Ji, whose face had turned slightly red for some reason, and suddenly realized that the problem still persisted.

"Boss Lin, please sit here."

Ji Zhixiu bent down and respectfully pulled out her seat, her beautiful gown accentuating her perfect curves as she did so.

Lin Jie glanced at what was obviously the main seat and hesitated. "Miss Ji, you're being too polite. I'm a guest today. The main seat... I'm afraid that wouldn't be too appropriate."

Ji Zhixiu's heart skipped a beat. Could it be that Boss Lin was displeased because she had observed him with the roses...?

"No, even if you're a guest, to me, you are still a benefactor that turned my life around," replied Ji Zhixiu immediately as she lowered her head. "I won't be able to repay you even if I give my all, so please at least allow me to treat you with the utmost respect."

Having such an inclination isn't bad. Keep it up and remember to buy

more books.

Such a thought floated through Lin Jie's mind, but he sighed immediately after. He felt that Miss Ji, who used to be a little reserved, was abandoning herself more and more. *Has she not yet given up on me, or has she changed her mind?*

"Sigh, Miss Ji, I told you about the gulf between us previously. It's impossible for us to..."

Ji Zhixiu panicked even more upon hearing this. She was certain that Boss Lin was dissatisfied and felt that her actions weren't devoted enough.

No, the final cooperation was imminent. There mustn't be any mistakes.

The panicking Ji Zhixiu swore aloud, "Please believe me when I say that my everything, be it my body or soul, has long belonged to you. My w-will exists for you!"

Huh?!

Chapter 364: Older Gingers Are Spicier

Body?

Soul?

It all belongs to me?

This crazy confession was way too sudden. Lin Jie was shocked.

However, as a specialized life mentor and expert dealer of chicken soup for the soul, he had seen all kinds of scenarios.

Thus, Boss Lin tried his best to not let his expression crack. After spending a moment to think, he calmed down and felt that his previous guess had been spot on...

His rejection of Miss Ji back then seemed to have the opposite effect as time passed. She must have usually suppressed her feelings to the point that she felt she had gotten over it. But now, as if because she was at home—a comfortable and relaxed environment—all the emotions welled up inside her heart had suddenly rebounded.

But you can't just confess so bluntly!

Could it be that... his gestures of familiarity at the previous night's ball had given Ji Zhixiu the misconception that there was still room for negotiation?

Boss Lin inhaled sharply. He reckoned that he couldn't continue rejecting her so acutely now, for it might cause Miss Ji, who had been hurt by love, to have PTSD.

He sighed and put on his usual professional smile, having decided to guide her patiently. With a heavy heart, he said, "No... How can all of it be mine?"

Ji Zhixiu tried to retort, "I..."

Lin Jie interrupted her with a solemn look on his face and explained matter-of-factly, “That isn’t self-respecting at all! Your body and soul ought to only belong to you and your will should exist as your ideals. Do you understand?”

As if struck by a bolt of lightning, Ji Zhixiu froze in place.

Lin Jie knew that his chicken soup had been effective when he saw Miss Ji intimidated by him. That’s right. When dealing with an opponent deeply in love, one had to use morality and righteousness to disrupt the other party’s thoughts and turn her attention back to her career and not to a man.

He continued, “I don’t want to see a soulless Ji Zhixiu. She ought to be a strong, independent woman with her own views who fights for the future of Rolle Resources. Moreover, she should be able to support this huge company, unlike her current self. You can trust me, but you shouldn’t rely on me.”

Ji Zhixiu’s mouth gaped as she stared at Lin Jie blankly. She had been about to say, “*My dream was given to me by you...*”

Creak — Someone opened the door.

Ji Bonong cleared his throat as he pushed the door ajar, slightly dissipating the somewhat stagnant atmosphere of the room.

Ji Zhixiu couldn’t help but heave a sigh of relief. Although her father was just an ordinary person, Ji Bonong was still many times better than her when it came to dealing with people.

It would be a lot more reassuring with her father present—as long as he didn’t lose his mind due to the terrifying mental pressure of being in the presence of such an overwhelming transcendent existence.

In truth, Ji Bonong had nearly lost his wits and his consciousness after being frightened by Lin Jie’s act of consuming that Supreme-rank existence. Right now, he was someone nervously tidying up his appearance as he entered.

Lin Jie was stunned to see Ji Bonong. The professional smile on his

face was maintained, but awkwardness consumed him deep down.

*F*ck, f*ck, f*ck, f*ck.*

Had Ji Bonong heard what he just said?

What he had said in front of Ji Zhixiu's father just now—"You can trust me, but you shouldn't rely on me"? What condescending attitude he had shown toward the daughter of this powerful man...

Ah, so that's how I sell books. But it doesn't matter!

As long as he was thick-skinned enough, he could even fool the other party's father!

Lin Jie maintained his smile and pretended to be as nonchalant as he could in a bid to bluff his way out. "Well, this was supposed to be the first time we meet... But, now I ought to say that it's been a while, Mr. Ji."

While slightly panicking, Lin Jie couldn't help silently cursing deep down, *I agreed to have a meal, but why did it end up as a meeting with her parents? It seems like Miss Ji's invitation was just a pretext. Her true intention was to bring me to see her father!*

Both he and Ji Bonong were adults, so they could probably see through Ji Zhixiu's intentions at a glance. There hadn't been any hostility when Lin Jie had caught his gaze just a moment ago, but Ji Zhixiu was his biological daughter after all. Could this be a belated interrogation?

Lin Jie smiled at Ji Bonong, prepared to give up the main seat. *Since the true owner of the manor was here, this seat ought to...*

But while he was still thinking about it, Ji Bonong sat down without any hesitation before Lin Jie had even moved.

"It's indeed been a while, Boss Lin," Ji Bonong replied rather naturally.

Lin Jie froze up awkwardly. *What's up with Ji Bonong? Aren't you the president of Rolle Resources? Where's your pride as a capitalist? Is it*

appropriate for you not to take the main seat?

“Mr. Ji, you’re the chairman of Rolle Resource, Miss Ji’s father, and the master of A16 Manor, whereas I’m just an ordinary bookstore owner with no power or money. Logically speaking, this seating arrangement isn’t appropriate...” Lin Jie tactfully reminded Ji Bonong.

Truth be told, Ji Bonong had nearly knelt down just now if he hadn’t held on to the armrests of the chair. However, his body was trembling slightly and his palms were clammy.

As a mortal, it was thanks to his high status of many years that he was able to hold it together.

Ji Bonong’s heart skipped a beat when he heard what Lin Jie said. He cautiously sneaked a glance, wondering what Mr. Lin had meant.

Witnessing Boss Lin devouring the Supreme-rank transcendent being alive had terrified Ji Bonong, making him hesitant about their cooperative partnership. Now, Boss Lin was probably... reminding him.

Ji Bonong’s secular identity might seem prominent, but in reality, he was just but a shiny tool. On the other hand, while Boss Lin appeared most ordinary, he was actually an incomparably powerful existence.

The hesitation in his heart would determine the status of ordinary folk among transcendent beings. This was the choice Boss Lin had given him!

Ji Bonong took a deep breath. Yes, if he chose the seat of honor, it would mean that he acknowledged his status in the secular world. If he remained in his current seat, it meant he acknowledged the world of... transcendent beings.

Boss Lin feels it’s inappropriate because he noticed my hesitation and is mocking me... Coupled with what he just said to Xiu, he’s telling me that I don’t see myself clearly and lack that determination...

Lin Jie's lips twitched slightly as he noticed Ji Bonong's colorful expression and wondered to himself, *Haa... No way, it's just giving up my seat. Do you upper-class people have to spend so much effort just contemplating it?*

Ji Bonong eventually gave a determined reply, "Yes, this seat is more than apt."

Lin Jie tried to retort, "No, don't you think..."

"No, no, no." Ji Bonong waved his hand repeatedly. Now, he truly understood what Boss Lin's words meant. This was a test.

The first part of what Boss Lin is telling me not to belittle myself, but the second part was to make me understand that I mustn't view myself too highly at the same time.

Therefore, it was even more impossible for Ji Bonong to take the seat of honor.

"Boss Lin is able to generously share your books with the general public so that all the readers are able to gain a drop of the great knowledge you have collected. It's like you are a foster parent of all the readers."

Ji Bonong said this from the bottom of his heart, "What I mean is that it's our honor, as well as the whole of Norzin's, that you are willing to have a cooperative partnership with Rolle Resource. If it weren't for you, we would never have been able to come into contact with knowledge that doesn't exist in Norzin. So this seating arrangement... can't be any more appropriate."

Boss Lin liked to keep a low profile and didn't like others emphasizing his existence, so Ji Bonong had to praise his books. *This shouldn't be wrong, right...* Ji Bonong took out a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead dry.

Isn't this way too much of an exaggeration? thought Lin Jie to himself. *It's no wonder he got to where he is today due to his eloquence. For the sake of those books considered unique in Norzin, the president of Rolle Resource actually lowered himself to take a lesser seat. He's a really*

complex character indeed. It has to be said that older gingers are spicier.

However... Lin Jie eyed Ji Zhixiu sitting obediently at the side. At least the matter of force feeding chicken soup to her is finally over...

“Alright... Back to business. I’ve prepared a gift for Miss Ji’s birthday.”

Lin Jie changed the topic and pulled out a book. “However, since Mr. Ji is here too, I have a gift for you as well.”

Ji Bonong’s eyes widened. “This...”

“This is my gift to Chairman Ji.” Lin Jie smiled and placed the book in front of Ji Bonong.

The Wealth of Nations , also known as ***An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*** , was an economics book written by the English economist and philosopher Adam Smith that was the product of over a decade of studies.

While being the leader of a commercial empire, Rolle Resource’s monopoly might not last indefinitely. Thus, in short, this book was supposedly a reminder.

Lin Jie was rather confident in his choice of books.

The saying that there was no free lunch was apt here. The reason for Ji Bonong’s praises partially was to make Lin Jie feel good and a tad guilty. Now, if they were to negotiate, Lin Jie would feel awkward to raise his price.

Then, I’ll give you this present, to return the favor—even though I had already promised to give this gift before.

Ji Bonong’s pupils constricted as he stared at the book on the table in horror. He lowered his head and took a closer look. This was like an invisible hand that had firmly grabbed his gaze, making him unable to pry his eyes away. An uncontrollable sense of curiosity and desire was rising in his heart.

However, due to the strange force field enveloping the book, the

ordinary Ji Bonong couldn't make out the cover clearly.

Even though he was mentally prepared that Lin Jie would give him a book that would help him become a transcendent being, he still wasn't able to accept it calmly.

Or rather, wouldn't it be strange if he could take the book in a calm fashion.

Eyes still fixated on the book, Ji Bonong took a deep breath and forced himself to calm down.

He warned himself that he couldn't lose his composure in front of Boss Lin. Gathering his thoughts, he focused his vision and reached out a trembling hand to take the book. The mosaic-like fog faded, and he finally saw the cover.

On the cover, which was still blurry to his eyes, was written—

Void Palm .

Chapter 365: Void Palm

Void Palm .

Vast taboo knowledge flew through the thick pages like flies and flew toward Ji Bonong the moment he saw the book's title clearly.

Aahh—!

He hadn't been mentally prepared at all and subconsciously wanted to scream and wave his hands to drive them away.

However, in the next moment, he was already surrounded by these flies. His entire body was covered, and he could feel the flies burrowing into his body from every orifice, especially his eyes.

The trembling Ji Bonong was unable to move. He could clearly feel as if the feet of countless bugs were squirming on the sclera of his eyes, densely packed and increasing by the second.

His eyes were gradually filled as the rolling and crawling insects made it appear as if his eyes were bubbling like boiling water.

In his field of vision, every single fly was engraved with countless ancient and unknown words.

Ji Bonong felt as if he was being buried alive in a sea of insects. He wanted to breathe, but he could only wave his arms around helplessly and 'swim' with great difficulty. However, the reality was that, in the eyes of anyone on the outside, he was merely moving his arms and turning the pages swiftly.

The only thing out of the normal was his drooping head, as if he had already lost consciousness. But on closer look, it would appear as if he was just too focused.

Lin Jie secretly felt a sense of pride in his ability in picking books as he watched Ji Bonong with his head lowered and totally engrossed in reading.

Even if he was a slacker that couldn't really do anything, at least he was still decent when it came to selling books.

Seeing Ji Bonong so absorbed that his gaze never strayed away, Lin Jie knew that this book was definitely to his liking.

With a smile, Lin Jie turned his head and whispered softly, "It seems like Mr. Ji really likes this book. Let's not disturb him for now... How about we eat first?"

His last sentence was directed at Ji Zhixiu who was opposite him.

Ji Zhixiu's nervous face was pale. Stiffly pulling her eyes away from her father, she forced a smile. "Boss Lin is right... Let's eat first."

At this very moment, she was extremely terrified yet excited at the same time.

Since Boss Lin was willing to give this book, it meant that Ji Bonong had gained his recognition. He, who was a mere mortal, would have the opportunity to become a transcendent being!

This, too, would also be the greatest opportunity for Rolle Resource!

This was well worth Ji Zhixiu's excitement. However, the scene before her also made her experience a skin-crawling fear.

Because in the eyes of a transcendent being like her, this didn't seem like a book but was clearly a glossy black lump of some unknown matter. It was like glue, but also like thick fog, or a channel akin to a black-hole. A dark hand reached out from the hole and firmly grabbed Ji Bonong's body, completely enveloping him.

Moreover, that black hand was made up of countless bugs that were like locusts or flies, buzzing all around and consuming Ji Bonong.

They... they are eating my father!

This realization made Ji Zhixiu break out in cold sweat. Her anxiety caused her teeth to chatter as she tried her best to suppress her pounding heartbeat.

She knew that a completely ordinary person with no talent had to pay a sufficient price if he wanted to become a transcendent being. Everything in the world was equal...

However, this scene still far transcended what she had imagined.

As Ji Bonong was completely smothered by the swarm, the air started to smell like rotting sludge, and it made Ji Zhixiu feel as if she was soaking in oil.

Now, what remained in the seat flipping through the book seemed to be some indistinct humanoid figure.

Within the bright side hall they were in, this was an extremely strange sight.

Servants began to serve the dishes... but no one questioned their master's condition, nor did they think anything was wrong. They came in well-trained and went out quietly as if they couldn't see it at all.

Ji Zhixiu tried her best to calmly pick up her cutlery as she cast a sneaky glance at Boss Lin.

Lin Jie wasn't the least bit affected as he turned to thank a servant politely. Then, noticing Ji Zhixiu's gaze, he asked with a smile, "Does Miss Ji have something to ask?"

That smile of his made Ji Zhixiu clam up.

That's right, this was a test.

She wanted to call her father back, but she didn't dare.

On one hand, she was worried that her indecision would attract Boss Lin's disgust, causing her father to fail Boss Lin's test, but on the other hand, she was afraid that her father might never return... This was her worry as a daughter, but because this was Boss Lin's will, she wouldn't go against it.

Ji Zhixiu bit her lower lip and glanced at Boss Lin again. Taking a deep breath, she shook her head firmly. "No, I was just wondering

if these dishes are to your liking.”

“Um...”

Ahh, so it was this . He had wondered why Ji Zhixiu was being nervous all of a sudden.

Lin Jie raised his head slightly and smacked his lips as he pondered for a moment. Norzin’s traditional Western-style food didn’t interest him very much indeed, and he wondered if he had subconsciously frowned due to the flashy but insubstantial plating, causing Miss Ji to overthink.

Chuckling, Lin Jie jested, “I like them all. To be honest, it’s impossible for me to enjoy such delicacies when all I do is run an obscure bookstore on the corner of a street. I really have to thank Miss Ji for giving me such an opportunity.”

Ji Zhixiu waved her hand and said, “No, not at all. We ought to be thanking you for coming instead. Everything is fine as long as you like it.”

Lin Jie rubbed his chin and mused, “However, I do have some biases... Such as the honey cake Charlotte recommended earlier in the morning. That’s an unforgettable taste indeed.”

“!” Ji Zhixiu’s hand trembled, and she nearly knocked over her wine glass.

“What’s wrong?” Lin Jie was baffled.

“...” Ji Zhixiu shook her head like a rattle drum and tried her best to erase the image of Boss Lin devouring the Supreme-rank existence from her mind.

Lin Jie was somewhat worried.

Why does it seem like Miss Ji’s been especially nervous since just now?
Boss Lin pondered for a moment. Noticing Ji Bonong still engrossed in reading, he suddenly understood.

Yeah, that’s right. It’s because her father is beside her... Her passionate

confession was overheard by her own father. Anyone in that situation would feel nervous, and it's akin to a social death. Poor Miss Ji...

In the next moment, Ji Zhixiu suddenly realized that she had lost her composure. She glanced at Lin Jie with both respect and fear, only to find that the bookstore owner didn't comment on her panic nor rudeness. Instead, he smiled at her with a look of unparalleled sympathy.

Was this the sympathy from a higher being? Sympathizing her ignorance and weakness... or perhaps both of theirs.

Sigh... Lin Jie really couldn't stand it anymore. This knot in Miss Ji's heart... Forget it. I can't mercilessly reject her a second time in front of her father. At least, I'll wait till after the banquet .

"Miss Ji, how about a toast? To the partnership between my bookstore and Rolle Resource."

Lin Jie raised his wine glass with a friendly gaze, vaguely indicating that only the matter of business could completely cover over the awkwardness from before. "The five books were selected meticulously by me, and I hope Rolle Resource makes good use of them."

Ji Zhixiu's eyes widened as excitement rushed over her. Mentioning the collaboration at this time meant...

She immediately raised her glass. "You will definitely be able to witness the sincerity of Rolle Resources, no, our Ji Family! To our partnership!"

Clink.

A crisp clinking of glass sounded, as if a beautiful pebble had been thrown into a calm lake with surging undercurrents, creating ripples.

Falling into a sudden daze, Ji Zhixiu found that the wine glass raised before her didn't seem to be in the hands of a human male. Instead it appeared like a dark, hazy palm.

Her heart tightened as she felt the urge to turn and look at her father.

The invisible hand that was holding on to Ji Bonong's soul instantly retracted as if it had touched a hot iron when the two wine glasses knocked.

"Haa—" Ji Bonong suddenly raised his head. It was as if he had fought for a long time in the stomach of some evil beast and managed to finally escape. As if he were a dried out fish being returned to sea.

He had escaped from the swamp of the book.

Lin Jie blinked and sat back down. "Mr. Ji, do you think that this book will be of help to you?"

Ji Bonong was momentarily at a loss, then he clenched his fists and said almost ecstatically, "Yes, of course! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you..."

He was almost incoherent because, from this moment on, the world in his eyes was completely different. The flies that had penetrated deep into his body had constructed passages from nothing, filling them with aether.

He, Ji Bonong, had become a transcendent being!

This was a miracle!

Chapter 366: Lin Jie's Birthday Present

Ji Bonong has no other words besides utter gratitude.

The process was painfully beyond belief, and the sensation of pathways being burrowed through his body was almost unbearable. However, now, his entire body had already undergone a tremendous change.

His eyes were filled with aether, and he could view the flow of aether in this world.

Aether had also augmented his skin and muscles, making them stronger and tougher.

More importantly, the flies that were previously torturing him hadn't disappeared completely. Instead, they were hidden somewhere in the void behind him and had become a power he could control...

"Mr. Ji is too kind. It's great that it is of help to you. Heh, I spent a long time picking out this book."

Lin Jie blushed with shame, but an exaggerated reaction like this from Ji Bonong was quite normal. After all, the might of this book was rather huge even back on Earth, let alone in this slightly backward other world.

He straightened his posture, assuming his habitual pose of crossed arms with a hand holding his chin, and said earnestly, "The power contained within this book could subvert society. It's like an invisible hand that can flip the balance of the entire world. I hope Mr. Ji can make good use of it."

An 'Invisible Hand' was the most concise summary of *The Wealth of Nations* .

The “Invisible Hand” theory was that an invisible hand automatically regulates the functioning of the economy, which promotes the interests of society as a whole, even if everyone is acting in their own interests.

This theory was also the foundation of the Western free economy, although there were some drawbacks to completely following this free economy. Moreover, in Lin Jie’s 21st century society, most of the content of *The Wealth of Nations* was behind the times.

However, in Norzin’s current circumstances, *The Wealth of Nations* could be considered significantly advanced.

Lin Jie himself had no ambitions and didn’t have much practical use for books like this, so it was rather suitable for it to be given to President Ji.

“Invisible Hand...” Ji Bonong found it difficult to quell his excitement as he recited the words. Those flies hidden in the void... or perhaps something else had controlled him like a hand.

“Yes, the invisible hand,” Lin Jie gave an affirmative answer.

Then, with a solemn expression, he added, “Mr. Ji, although I’m giving this book to you out of trust in Miss Ji, I still have a question for you. In this world, the weak are often bullied and no one punishes those who trample over them. Do you think there should be a righteous god to uphold justice for them?”

All the hairs on Ji Bonong’s body stood on end when he heard this.

What did Boss Lin have in mind, but asking this question and telling him about the invisible hand that represented Void Palm?

In other words, the essence of this question seemed to be... whether such a god could use his invisible hand that could change the laws to carry out his own justice.

Ji Bonong was silent for some time before he replied unsteadily, “In my opinion, I think they should...”

“No no no.” Lin Jie raised his index finger and shook it. “There

shouldn't."

Ji Bonong choked.

"Things like the divine don't exist," said Lin Jie calmly as he spread his hands apart. "If we truly must have a god, it's probably because... the truth and laws of this world are too cheap that it requires a god descending from the heavens to save it."

Lin Jie had still chosen his words a little more carefully, considering the popularity of religion in Norzin.

"The weakness of human nature is to seek benefits and avoid harm." Lin Jie summarized another key point in ***The Wealth of Nations***. "Humans are spurred on for benefits, while anything that goes against human interests and urges humans to do certain things is considered inhumane."

"It's precisely because of this that when the invisible hand pushes the laws, it often causes people to chase after benefits fervently when they have freedom, which ultimately leads toward destruction."

Ji Bonong suddenly recalled when he had previously eavesdropped—he considered it eavesdropping, but when he thought about it again now, it appeared that Boss Lin had deliberately said it for him to hear.

Boss Lin had said that the upper echelons of Norzin were filled with lots of vermin and the power of the remnants of old noble families was corroding Norzin. Those were the people who pursued profit.

Ji Bonong glanced down at the book, seemingly starting to understand why Boss Lin had meticulously selected this book for him.

"Rolle Resource wants to liberate humanity, to liberate the oppressed," he muttered softly before his eyes lit up with excitement. "This is Rolle Resource's true goal! Thank you for your guidance!"

Ahh? It's me, probably... Lin Jie felt slightly awkward on the inside.

He had merely intended to make Ji Bonong more vigilant and not turn into a capitalist who only cared about benefits. However, it now appeared as if he had made the latter comprehend something extraordinary.

Lin Jie cleared his throat sheepishly. “In any case, what’s most important is actually the effort and hard work of humans themselves. Subjugation and oppression aren’t desirable at all.”

That’s right, oppressors are all inhumane. Those so-called religious organizations that restrained their congregations were all exploiting human nature. The Church of the Dome had long corroborated this point.

Boss Lin... Ji Bonong thought to himself. Boss Lin seems to be enemies of Supreme-ranks. His goal is to liberate humanity.

Wait a minute!

Ji Bonong suddenly seemed to think of something. If Boss Lin is a higher entity that surpasses Supreme-ranks, who only has unceasing sympathy for humans and tries to help them, and he can also easily change the laws...

Such benevolence, such power.

Could it be, he’s... a creator?

Ji Bonong calmed his rampant thoughts with a deep breath as he clenched the book in his hand tightly. “I understand what Boss Lin means. I’ll definitely remember your words and persevere on this path to lead Rolle Resource to a brighter future.”

“Good that you think so.” That’s if you really understand and not comprehend something entirely weird...

Blinking several times, Lin Jie reiterated the main point earnestly, “In short, I reckon that the path for Rolle Resource lies not with the upper echelons, but instead should let the glory of humanitarianism spread throughout Norzin. It has to work for the benefit of the majority... And the love and recognition of these masses will become Rolle Resource.”

“That’s right.” Ji Bonong nodded vigorously. “For the ordinary man just like me to one day extricate themselves from oppression!”

Lin Jie’s lips twitched. *Ordinary man? Old man, you really have a way with words... Ordinary Norzin’s... richest?! That’s the most extreme of humble-brags!*

However, at least the main point hadn’t been misunderstood. Given Rolle Resource’s current monopoly, the negative impact that the book, ***The Wealth of Nations***, might have ought to be greatly reduced.

Lin Jie cleared his throat. “We’ve already gone off topic and I almost forgot that we aren’t in the bookstore now. Let’s stop talking about books. I’m actually here to deliver a present.”

He looked toward Ji Zhixiu and said with full sincerity, “A few months ago, during a storm, Miss Ji and I crossed paths and became friends through books. A long time has passed since, and in my opinion, we can already be considered best friends.”

Lin Jie emphasized the word “friend” to let Ji Zhixiu understand their relationship.

“Happy birthday, Miss Ji.” Lin Jie nonchalantly took out a plain wooden box from behind his back.

“Open it.” Lin Jie pushed the box toward Ji Zhixiu.

Ji Zhixiu eyed the plain-looking box. Taking a deep breath, she glanced once at her father before plucking up her courage and gently opened the box.

The box was peeled away to reveal an exquisite mechanical clock-like structure.

Ji Zhixiu was stunned.

Seeing Ji Zhixiu’s surprised expression, Lin Jie couldn’t help coughing dryly. This was actually the Clock-wheel Worm that Andrew had previously given Lin Jie which was now being reused as a present.

This was entirely because his dirt-poor bookstore really didn't have anything much to offer. Ji Zhixiu had a rather tight relationship with him, so Lin Jie reckoned he couldn't always be giving her lady's books every time.

Therefore, this exquisite clock came to Lin Jie's mind.

While he had silently complained that gifting a clock was a homophone for sending someone off (at a funeral), such a term didn't exist in Norzin. And since he didn't really have anything on hand, Lin Jie had just brought it along.

It was originally in an exquisite enamel box, but unfortunately, Boss Lin's weak human nature had made him peel it open—That box had seemed to be worth a bit as well.

"Don't just assume that this is just an ordinary clock," said Lin Jie with a smile. He took the clock out from the box and pointed at the tiny bug lying within. "It has an extraordinary power source."

Chapter 367: Toy

“Look.”

Ji Zhixiu’s gaze subconsciously followed Lin Jie’s finger, and then she noticed the bottom half of this small exquisite clock.

Behind the smooth dial made of rubies set in a sterling silver frame hidden within a complicated frame and beneath all the interlocking gears was a tiny... caterpillar?

The caterpillar was crawling on the exquisitely crafted gear contraption. With each step it crawled, the second hand of the clock would make a ‘click’ and drive the entire machine.

“This is...” Ji Bonong’s eyes widened slightly, his expression frozen.

Ji Zhixiu’s jaw dropped. She was in complete shock and couldn’t even speak.

Lin Jie’s smile widened seeing the reactions of the two.

While this clock was merely a flashy plaything, or a toy to the rich, it couldn’t be denied that it was really aesthetically pleasing. Anyone could tell that it was a priceless item as long as they weren’t blind.

Something capable of leaving the president of Rolle Resource that held a commercial monopoly of Norzin dumbfounded... Andrew’s gift had really been spot-on.

The reason why Lin Jie felt that the enamel box was worth a lot of money instead of this small clock was because he felt that regardless of how much he sold the small clock for, it would be a huge loss. He couldn’t let it go easily, and it was better to use it as a trade for a favor.

This repackaged gift was definitely comparable to the case of items the Ji father and daughter pair had given him last time—inclusive

of the golden apple.

This time round, when it came to negotiations, Lin Jie could finally bargain without holding back.

This back and forth has resulted in huge gains without any capital. How profitable...

At these thoughts, Lin Jie couldn't help beaming.

Ji Zhixiu's eyes were fixated on the tiny worm that was still crawling on its own. Her mouth had gone dry and she gulped silently.

If this clock was revealed outside, perhaps not even one out of ten people might know its value.

However, in this small side hall, even Ji Bonong knew where it came from and how valuable it was.

This was the heirloom of the Truth Union Vice-Chairman Andrew's family and was one of the priceless treasures of the Truth Union. Yet, Boss Lin put it in such a plain box and gave it away so casually...

Ji Zhixiu tried her best to calm her frantically pounding heart. Ever since she had gained Ruen's memories and absorbed his intelligence network into 'Spider,' the latter had now become the organization with the greatest intelligence in Norzin.

Ruen had been full of ambition, and he also had the forbearance that matched it as well as the support of a huge intelligence network. Unfortunately, he lacked a little luck and died to the claws of Boss Lin's stone gargoyles, prematurely cutting short his dreams.

Even so, due to his intelligence network, Ruen was worthy of his moniker, 'Underground Emperor.'

This was an intelligence network so powerful that, back then, it could even obtain information about Wilde being in Norzin.

Had he and his ambitions not died in the bookstore then, Secret

Rite Tower might have yet another difficult enemy on their hands...

Therefore, it wasn't the least bit out of the ordinary for Ji Zhixiu, who had gained Ruen's all memories, to know about this secret treasure that had belonged to Andrew's family.

Ji Bonong, on the other hand, had often relied on his many years of experience to help Ji Zhixiu deal with some information regarding the transcendent community. He, too, also understood the value of this little thing in front of him.

The father and daughter pair exchanged the same burning gaze with each other.

Having just experienced such a terrifying test, Ji Bonong's determination and perseverance to endure pain, as well as Ji Zhixiu's loyalty to endure even when she saw her father in an uncertain predicament, had finally gotten them Boss Lin's approval!

The Clock-wheel Worm—An object that was only talked about in legends had actually been placed before them so casually!

According to information they had, this seemingly feeble and harmless caterpillar was actually a four-dimensional creature that had unintentionally encountered this lower-dimension world and happened to be captured by powerful transcendent beings of the Andrew Family.

What an incredible, terrifying power!

Getting caught in that instant akin to a flash of lightning and being turned into a power that could change laws.

That's right, this transcendent object from the Andrew Family was one of the few items that could temporarily possess the domain of law that only Supreme-ranks possessed.

The pin drop silence in the room lasted for quite a while. Lin Jie could understand how it felt to be stunned by the ingenuity of such a marvelous piece of work.

"Using an insect to power the clock. Such an ingenious idea is far

more amazing than its beautiful appearance.

“Just like humans, good-looking ones are a dime a dozen, but interesting souls are one in a hundred.”

Lin Jie didn't feel at all guilty about reusing someone else's gift as his own as he continued on matter-of-factly, “Miss Ji, in my opinion, is both good looking and interesting. But most importantly, you have a heart that is still trying to move forward, just like this clock that never stops. Therefore, I'm giving it to you in hopes that you always continue to do so.”

“This- It's way too precious...” Ji Zhixiu had gotten up from her seat. Lips pursed, and with some hesitation, she muttered, “Such a precious gift...”

It being precious was one thing, but more importantly, this was a secret heirloom treasure of the Andrew Family.

Ji Zhixiu knew for sure that she would have to pay a price if she wanted to obtain the item in Boss Lin's items. And that price depended on how precious the item was.

And now, what sort of price would she have to fork out for such a priceless treasure?

Lin Jie waved his hand nonchalantly. “Haa, what's so precious about it? In fact, the most important thing about a gift is the thought behind it, right? I see that it's exquisitely made, but it's of not much use to me, so why not give it to you? I felt that you might like this sort of toy.”

Mm, young ladies probably like this sort of exquisite and aesthetically pleasing toy —This was Lin Jie's valuable experience from his barren interactions with the opposite sex.

Toy... Little plaything...

Ji Zhixiu fell silent.

You call this a toy?

What's there about it to play with?

Toying with the rules of time?

But perhaps, in Boss Lin's view, this symbol that represented the apex of humanity's intelligence and the limits of transcendent beings was really just a mere plaything. A lousy toy made of mud by an urchin who had just learned how to speak.

A ludicrously clumsy one...

Ji Zhixiu couldn't help grimacing. She couldn't decline it, nor did she have the intention to do so. However, there was one thing she had to consider...

That was her current level was still that of a Pandemonium-rank transcendent being. Even if she obtained a transcendent tool of this level, she had no way of using it.

However, Lin Jie was determined to give this 'clock/toy' to Ji Zhixiu. He looked at her sincerely and moved to pass her the item in his hand.

Ji Zhixiu hesitated for a moment. Even if she obtained it now, she wouldn't be able to use it.

Using the Clock-wheel Worm required an unimaginably large amount of aether to activate the four-dimensional creature and make time move under its influence.

It was rumored that several centuries ago, the Truth Union had wanted to activate this weapon for some reason and gather a huge amount of aether from the upper echelons, using the charm of manipulating time as a warning to other transcendent organizations.

Ji Zhixiu didn't know whether they succeeded in using it, but as long as the Andrew Family controlled it, they would be able to stay strong within the Truth Union.

Perhaps, the Andrew Family didn't even have the intention of ever using it again.

If this powerful weapon that held dominion over laws was used, the consequences would be unimaginable. In fact, Ji Zhixiu very much doubted whether the Clock-wheel Worm at present could still be used.

But... Since Boss Lin has brought it out, it's definitely usable, just that most wouldn't be able to manage it. Ji Zhixiu quickly did a mental analysis, and suddenly came to a conjecture.

Since it can't be used, then... maybe, this is a keepsake?

The Truth Union believes in the highest knowledge of mankind, which is ultimate wisdom and science.

And just now, Boss Lin had said... Truth and Laws.

Isn't that the Truth Union's purpose?

From not believing in gods to liberating human nature, and then the Andrew Family's heirloom treasure... Everything seemed to coincide with the Truth Union.

He's hinting that he wants Spider as well as Rolle Resources to rely on this keepsake Clock-wheel Worm and join forces with the Truth Union to defeat the false gods that oppress humanity and the transcendent beings that bully the weak.

Ji Zhixiu had thoroughly received a revelation. Everything made sense now.

She looked at Lin Jie, whose eyes seemed so sincere.

Ji Zhixiu was excited. She understood Boss Lin's intentions once again but, at the same time, she was shaking. Could she really take on such a heavy responsibility...

Strange... Lin Jie thought. It's just a small toy. Why did Miss Ji remain silent for so long and is gazing at me so solemnly?

Could it be... she's afraid of caterpillars?

She actually doesn't like this present but can't reject it and is struggling

internally?

Perhaps that's it.

Even though Ji Zhixiu is an imposing feminine fighter that mercilessly hunts down scumbags that jilt her, even the toughest girl has a soft side. Could it be that she's really afraid of caterpillars?

“Uh... Miss Ji, are you scared?” Lin Jie broke the silence.

Ji Zhixiu's heart skipped a beat when she heard this. Yes, she was afraid.

Compared to the trivialities in the past, the fact that Boss Lin had given out a Supreme-rank object this time meant the mission wasn't ordinary by any means. But at present, she hadn't even attained Destructive-rank yet, so it would be a lie to say that she wasn't afraid.

Can I really become the savior of the weak?

Ji Zhixiu thought to herself somewhat dejectedly. Then, she lowered her head and answered truthfully, “I'm sorry to have disappointed you...”

Indeed... She's afraid of caterpillars, eh?

Lin Jie suddenly felt bad seeing Ji Zhixiu's disappointment. *This is a massive miscalculation. I never expected this... Ahh, I've given the wrong gift.*

“Uh, actually there's really nothing much to be afraid of.”

Lin Jie wanted to redeem his act of giving a failed gift. He quickly took the clock back and tried to rid Ji Zhixiu's fear with his actions.

“What's there to be afraid of? It's just a little bug. It won't bite.” Lin Jie smiled awkwardly as he fiddled with the slow crawling worm inside the mechanical contraption under the shocked gazes of the Ji father and daughter pair.

Chapter 368: Father And Daughter

67th Avenue.

The distance between the Central District and 67th Avenue spanned half of Norzin, yet appeared incomparably small when viewed from high up the sky. High above, a giant cloud swirl had formed, covering everything. As darkness akin to night fell, an unstoppable blizzard that had been brewing for a long time descended.

“Notice for all residents. Please do not go out during the snowstorm. Please do not go out during snowstorms...”

“The meteorological department has issued a red blizzard warning. The first blizzard in the history of Norzin has arrived. The Central District strictly forbids residents from going outside...”

Warning alarms blared on television and radio throughout Norzin.

However, unlike the storm a few months ago, the Central District did not carry out any evacuation of residents this time around. Instead, they were forced to stay put wherever they were.

A battle between two Supreme-rank powerhouses wouldn't stop because of small fry. If things really got carried away, not even a blade of grass would remain wherever the aether reached. The only thing the Central District could do...

“I'm afraid we'll have to awaken that individual in the Central District.”

Winston's fists were clenched as he watched the two masses of glowing aetheric energy colliding like two supernovas, creating a wave of light that could easily blind one's eyes.

After that flash, aetheric waves rippled out, like tsunamis threatening to flatten everything.

The man-made city of steel containing countless lives shattered like glass in the face of this battle between the two Supreme-ranks.

Is this the extreme limit of humans... or are Joseph and Wilde even humans at this point?

Winston was overcome with many complex emotions as he watched the blood and flesh flying around in the storm.

Fear, awe, worry...

As the Dream Creator had been activated some time ago, the entire battle was on the fringes of the dream realm and wouldn't affect reality for the time being. Therefore, the bloody storm wasn't truly made up from the blood, tears, and bones of Secret Rite Tower knights and Corpse Devouring Sect believers.

However, these torn pieces of flesh had become the best sacrificial offerings for Wilde, allowing his evil power to swell time and time again.

Winston watched as sword-wielding knights charged at the Corpse Devouring Sect disciples who were now like mindless zombies, sacrificing themselves time and time again like a meat grinder.

Winston's heart was heavy. He trembled occasionally and couldn't bear to watch on, but he still had to repeatedly give the order to charge.

He recalled the words he had said to Greg and now repeated them to himself.

Everything was for Secret Rite Tower's goal.

He glanced at his communications device. On the opposite end had been Greg, and also that bookstore owner.

A while ago, Greg seemed to have encountered an unexpected situation and hung up. Now it was all radio silence.

Is such a battle not enough to make Boss Lin look over? Or perhaps 'he' is happy to see such an outcome?

That bookstore owner shouldn't...shouldn't be like this.

In his daze, he seemed to see his old friend Joseph's reverence and dependence on the bookstore owner...

Joseph had been so blindly devoted to the bookstore owner, but the latter was just watching coldly from the sidelines.

No... Winston shook his head. Joseph has always been loyal to the Tower. Contacting the owner of the bookstore was essentially our order.

The Tower was trying to get on the bookstore owner's good side. So, if the bookstore owner really wanted Joseph dead, would the Tower choose to give up Joseph who has been loyal for so many years?

Winston didn't dwell on it. He felt himself getting the chills as he pulled himself back from his thoughts. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of the girl at the side.

Melissa, the girl who essentially grew up in Secret Rite Tower, was looking at the distant battlefield in a daze.

Her father was in the eye of the storm.

The chaotic aether field was like a meat grinder, instantly crushing everything into pieces and sending everything flying into the sky as a rain of blood and broken bones.

Winston tried to comfort her. "Don't worry, Melissa. Things are looking up..."

He wasn't lying. Although he couldn't see what was going on in the center of the battlefield, those white flames that had been doing their utmost to stop the spread of those shadowy black tentacles had already started to counterattack. The previous one-sided situation had been reversed.

It all seemed to be taking a turn of the better.

"No, no..." The girl had started to be distraught a while ago, her expression alternating between one of confusion and panic. At this moment, her eyes widened as she shook her head violently. Then,

grabbing her chest tightly, she actually turned and tried to make a dash toward the center of the battlefield.

“Melissa!” The Combat Division chief rushed forward to grab her. “What are you trying to do? Going now would only distract your father!”

Melissa struggled and wailed. “I’m going to save my father!”

Winston’s tone was austere. Although he had always been mostly cordial with Joseph, he had never been anything but kind to his friend’s daughter. But right now, his expression was deathly gloomy. “You would be rushing to your death! Think carefully about your identity. Think about Vivian who sacrificed herself to save you. Your father is fighting to protect you. What are you trying to do?!”

“I know! I know!” cried out Melissa, who also had to shout at the top of her lungs to be heard over the massive din of the battlefield.

The usually strong young female knight sounded like she was about to cry.

“I know that others have sacrificed themselves for me, and I know that we shouldn’t continue to get more people killed. I know too that I’m the daughter of a Radiant Knight. I ought to consider the bigger picture, but I’m also Joseph’s daughter. I can feel that...

“I can feel that my father is about to die...” Finally unable to control her tears, Melissa sobbed.

Die? Could it be...

Winston jerked his head toward the center of the battlefield.

The senses of transcendent beings were never false, not to mention that Joseph had now ascended to Supreme-rank, greatly increasing his mysticism. It was definitely possible for Melissa, who was connected by blood, to sense something that was about to happen.

Which also meant...

Ordinary-level transcendent beings couldn't see what was happening on the battlefield shrouded by aether, but Winston could vaguely perceive the terrifying outcome that seemed to be gradually unfolding.

Crack—

The boundary set up by the Dream Creator started to break apart as jagged cracks spread rapidly, the surging torrent of aether tearing at the fabric between dream and reality.

Winston was taken aback and loosened his grip for a moment. Melissa broke free and immediately rushed toward the battlefield without a care.

“Melissa!”

The girl wasn't afraid of death. She had only one simple thought in her mind— *I want to save my father.*

However, as Melissa was charging forward, she saw Secret Rite Tower knights and Corpse Devouring Sect believers retreating as if they had just witnessed something absolutely terrifying.

Those Corpse Devouring Sect members that had already lost their rationality completely ignored Melissa, and some were even scrambling away on all fours.

Melissa pushed through the crowd, passing through the dissipated boundary of the Dream Creator as well as the scattered aether, rushing to the center of the battlefield. Witnessing the scene before her made her eyes widen in shock—

Amidst the majestic backdrop that resembled an abyss colliding with the sky, many jet-black tentacles stretched out from the cracked ground, twisting together into an indescribable behemoth. A horrifying and sickly aura tainted the entire battlefield.

The ground began to tremble with the huge creature at the epicenter. A shock-wave that seemed to shatter the earth and sky burst forth, causing cracks to appear all over the ground.

Wilde had already completed yet another breakthrough.

The sight of those tentacles made Melissa's ears ring with mysterious whispers crying out and shaking her soul.

She suddenly spat out a mouthful of blood mixed with filth, covered her ears, and half-knelt.

Father... she cried out helplessly in her heart.

Chapter 369: Joseph And Wilde

A nauseating pungent smell as thick as paste filled the center of the battlefield.

Violent winds, blizzards, flesh, and dust formed a howling torrent. Corpses in the aetheric field were swallowed by the dark abyss spreading out on the ground like a quagmire. As countless forbidden incantations flashed purple, vein-like branches eked toward the center, flashing and extinguishing as if it were the pulsating heartbeat of some existence.

Those forbidden incantations were the greatest and most horrific sacrificial ritual that Wilde had ever set up.

Via this ritual, the corpses and souls of all the dead on this battlefield would become a part of his power, making him increasingly stronger.

Wilde took a deep breath, feeling the surging power gradually fill his body once more. The power was like a raging river roaring and yearning to wreak havoc, but his body as the vessel had fallen behind.

However, he couldn't abandon this body. His high-speed regenerative abilities prevented him from completely destroying himself and letting this power escape.

"Huu..." Wilde exhaled a scalding breath as he eyed his tattered black robe and suit. Wounds of all sizes were all over his body and he had a broken arm.

Fresh blood continuously flowed from the wound on his broken arm, where bits of squirming flesh had sprouted and was struggling against that acute sword aura engulfing the wound which was restricting regeneration.

Wilde cracked his head and glanced at the wound that would neither heal nor completely tear. After a brief moment of thought,

his eyes flickered, then without flinching, reached out and pressed against his broken arm that was merely dangling and attached to a few muscle fibers.

Squelch...

The terrifying sound of muscle fibers and flesh being ripped rang out. Wilde had torn out his broken arm and threw it to the side for the ground to devour.

Swoosh—

In the next moment, a dazzling white figure wielding a long-sword that could tear through space descended from the sky, shooting downward like a burning meteor.

Raging flames enveloped the burly figure in armor. His piercing eyes were filled with anger as he glared straight at Wilde and shouted furiously, “I’ve found you, Wilde! You can’t escape now!”

It was Joseph.

After fighting for quite some time, Wilde broke an arm and had taken the opportunity to retreat, resting beneath the cover of the chaotic aether field for a few seconds before Joseph caught up.

Wilde sneered as the swamp-like abyss beside him squirmed. In the next moment, a massive palm, followed by an arm, swatted at Joseph.

BOOM!

The massive palm formed from his dismembered arm clashed loudly with the flames around Joseph. A shock wave expanded out, swirling the sticky air all around them.

But unfortunately, with a loud shout from Joseph, the white flames enveloping his body blazed brilliantly as the edge of his sword cut through the palm with unstoppable momentum.

Shiing—

The sword tip hit the ground, and a huge sword gleam spanning hundreds of meters slashed, cutting through the air, splitting aether to the sides and destroying everything in its path. Even the massive palm was turned to ashes.

Joseph looked up after regaining his balance. Once again, Wilde was nowhere to be seen.

He raised his sword and pointed it in a certain direction, calling out icily, "It's useless, Wilde. Is running all that you know?!"

"Two years have passed and you're no different from back then. Just a stray dog running away with your tail between your legs."

Several thousand meters away stood Wilde who had once again flashed over. His gaze was solemn as he pondered.

At this moment, both of them knew that there wasn't much difference in strength between them. Perception wasn't much contrasting either, and it was impossible to keep a distance from each other as they would immediately be detected by the other party.

But what they needed the most right now was time.

The first step to become Supreme-rank was a comprehension of Laws. Both of them had arrived at that stage at practically the same time, and it was difficult to determine who was superior.

As for the second step, that would be forming a domain.

This was the most crucial step for Supreme-ranks, and also the source of their power.

It could be said that whoever could form a domain first would win this battle. Both sides were in a race against time.

Joseph kept chasing and fighting Wilde, not letting Wilde have any time to think about how to form his domain but at the same time giving up his own.

In such a tense battle, it was difficult for any one side to have a

breather.

Therefore, they were both waiting for an opportunity...

Wilde slowly revealed a sly smile.

Three, two, one.

After a mental countdown, he shakily raised his ceremonial knife in his remaining hand and prepared to chant an incantation. As expected, he saw Joseph shooting over like a brilliant light flare. Blazing white flames made of aether were left in the wake of his straight trajectory, instantly evaporating the abyssal filth that Wilde had summoned from the ground.

An opportunity! thought Joseph when he saw Wilde who seemed to have stopped in place due to exhaustion.

He raised his sword, feinting as if he intended to block, but he actually rapidly condensed aether in his fist and struck Wilde's abdomen, sending the old black magician flying instantly. Along with the many white blazes produced by the aetheric explosion, most of Wilde's body was largely broken in many places!

The moment he was hit, Wilde's smile grew wider as the momentum sent him flying.

As the battlefield had already been razed to the ground, Wilde was sent tumbling through the air until he crashed into a pillar at the edge of the Dream Creator's barrier.

Joseph turned into a streak of light that followed closely behind. He didn't dare relax one bit when he saw Wilde fall limply to the ground like a dead body. Gripping the hilt of his sword tightly, he readied himself to deal the final blow to Wilde at any moment.

But at the same time, he couldn't help feeling some slight hesitation and unease because this had gone too smoothly...

Wilde's insidiousness and craft required Joseph's utmost to take him down back then. Now, two years later, his bitter adversary shouldn't have been defeated so easily.

In his hesitation, a guess had formed in Joseph's mind.

But suddenly, his senses tingled, interrupting his thoughts. It was as if something in the distance was unintentionally tugging at him. And unknowingly, he had already been attracted by the threads of fate.

—*Melissa?!*

Joseph's heart thumped wildly. He turned around and saw his beloved daughter headed toward the battlefield and approaching the Dream Creator's barrier!

He hadn't noticed that their battle had already reached the fringes of the dream barrier.

And barely a thousand meters away, the silhouette of Melissa and Winston were clearly visible. The two of them seemed to be having a disagreement as Winston pulled Melissa back and said something.

"Heh-heh... Take a guess, Joseph. If I were to rush over now, what are the chances of me being able to kill your daughter?" Wilde's voice suddenly came alive, his tone indifferent but filled with malice and provocation.

Joseph's expression momentarily froze before it broke into a livid one.

By the time he returned to his senses, he had already smashed Wilde with all his might once more as explosive white flames engulfed his field of vision.

In the next second, he immediately realized that this was all Wilde's scheme to provoke him.

But this realization had come late!

Wilde's battered and broken body had flown far away once more. After coughing out a mouthful of blood, he laughed maniacally. "Ha-ha-ha-ha! Thank you, Joseph! If it weren't for your strength, I'm afraid I wouldn't have been able to break free from this rotten body and achieve a true Supreme-rank domain!"

Flames enveloping Wilde bit away at his body, completely suppressing his self-regenerating capabilities. His withered cells could no longer be reborn and turned into nothingness within the raging white blazes. Eventually, nothing remained.

However, there was indeed something different about the black magician.

Joseph's eyes nearly popped out of their sockets. It was only now did he realize that Wilde had used his own strike to completely comprehend his Law and formed his own domain!

The Radiant Knight wrapped his body in aether and charged after like a streak of light, trying to grab at Wilde!

But it was too late!

Before Joseph's hand could reach, Wilde's rapidly dissolving body, which was still laughing maniacally, burned away in the aether flames. At the same time, a new body was born from the destruction.

Wilde, who was close to becoming a god, was about to abandon his human body that restricted him.

Faster, faster—

Joseph willed himself and used all of his might to move quicker, hoping he could become even faster than time itself.

Wilde rapidly swelled up in the void. Beneath his robes no longer existed a human body but a ball of flesh with dozens of tentacles covered in lacquered red eyes.

The black magician's form was gone and was just like a huge piece of meat planted on the floor. Only a broken head still revealing that mocking grin remained atop the tentacled mass.

Every Supreme-rank existence had their own Laws which they ruled. At that moment, a new domain of Law was taking shape.

Every vein on Joseph's forehead and arms were bulging as he

roared furiously, wanting to kill his opponent before the transformation became complete.

He raised the sword in his hand, its blade burning whatever it touched rapidly. The collision of aether ignited dazzling white flames that were capable of vaporizing any ordinary person that looked directly at it.

Behind him, a huge humanoid figure of condensed light, similar in size to the newly amalgamated black magician's body, shadowed his actions.

However, these two figures were completely different.

"Joseph, our battle is coming to an end. Fate has decided to write the outcome." The last of Wilde's old head was burned by the blazing white flames, his raspy voice, lingering through the battlefield like a rotten smell, announcing—

"I will become destruction.

"What I've always been pursuing is destruction, but I can't touch the end of destruction and the true meaning because I can't personally experience destruction.

"And now, thank you, Joseph. Death is the point closest to destruction.

"Everything has an ending, and that eventuality now lies in my hands.

"Joseph," Wilde spoke as if he was calling out to a comrade, just that his voice was scattered, sharp, and frightening. Just hearing it could make one lose their mind.

"You will lose everything, be defeated, and die a miserable death. This, I've already seen very clearly."

Chapter 370: I Want To See Boss Lin!

Everyone on the battlefield heard this announcement like it was an ominous tolling.

A new domain was forming, and the Law of the new Supreme-rank had been established.

As Wilde's voice rang out, everyone could clearly feel formless aether sweeping over like a wave. The entire world seemed to have been deconstructed, turning into the complete embodiment of someone's will.

Transcendent beings among them instantly felt an uncontrollable fear that surpassed their thoughts and will. Without any way of resisting, it triggered their instinctive desire to live, urging them to flee.

Everyone fled, regardless of whether they were a knight of Secret Rite Tower or a disciple of the Corpse Devouring Sect.

However, how could they keep up with the speed of the Supreme-rank domain? In the next moment, invisible ripples chased after them. Everything caught by these ripples froze at first before turning into pitch-back fragments that eventually faded into nothingness. All that was touched was crushed by the Law and completely disappeared from this world.

Nothing lasted forever.

At the very end was only death and decomposition.

That was—eventuality.

The twisted behemoth that Wilde had transformed into blotted out the sky. It let out an inhuman roar in the raging blizzard and crushed toward Joseph with unstoppable Law.

“No—”

Melissa, who was shocked by the sudden change in mysticism of a true awakening of a Supreme-rank, knelt on the ground, dragging her bloody body along and shouting in despair.

Her small, pale face was stained with blood, her red hair flapping in the strong winds. Her blue eyes were lifeless as she watched her father being swallowed by the darkness. She tried to use her sword to prop herself up, but slid weakly to the ground.

Surviving knights all around were also dazed and feeling utter hopelessness.

Suddenly, a Corpse Devouring Sect disciple that had managed to escape the domain's influence noticed Melissa and staggered toward her.

Melissa merely remained where she was, oblivious to anything around her.

“Melissa, what are you doing? Get out of the way!”

Winston's furious roar exploded in his ears. He pulled Melissa to the side and lopped off the approaching fanatic's head.

The fanatic's corpse fell to the ground and became more nourishment for Wilde.

Winston looked at the scene and suddenly felt weary.

However, he quickly perked up when he saw Melissa beside him and went to help the now fainted girl up before quickly retreating further back.

The area covered by the domain of the Eventuality was deathly silent. The flames of war from the previous confrontation were no longer there. Even the flow of air had stagnated to a lifeless lull. Further back, the dream barriers from the second batch of Dream Creators were being strengthened, but everyone knew that... it was already all in vain.

Once Wilde completely crushed Joseph, the expanding domain would engulf them all.

The snowfall got heavier.

Snow got swept up by the wind, and the cold and despairing aura was sucked into Winston's lungs. Such a Law was almost impossible to break, and Winston could not think of any way to support Joseph.

Wilde used himself as the Law. Wherever his gaze went, everything turned into chaotic, destructive matter that could not be touched or felt.

It couldn't be heard, seen, or sensed. The final entropy was the eventuality of everything!

Wilde's powers were complete, and there was no longer any need for other sacrificial rituals. In fact, followers of the Corpse Devouring Sect didn't need to continue dying. However, the awakening of their Supreme-rank preacher inspired the remaining believers and they got even stronger. Thus, the remaining defense line wasn't able to hold on for much longer.

Gritting his teeth, Winston kept pressing on his communications device with trembling hands.

At this point, the only thing he could believe in was that extremely vague sentence.

Greg had said it. He had said that Mr. Lin would not watch Joseph fail. He had said that the final victory would be Joseph's!

The communications device in Winston's hand nearly slipped. It was only then did he realize it was covered in sweat from his nervous pressing, and he had even pressed the wrong button several times.

Beep—

The call finally connected.

“Huh?” A distracted Greg at the banquet felt the vibration of the communications device in his chest pocket and his heart skipped a beat. It had been agreed on that he was to provide the information, and it had only been a while since the last call. Why had Winston called him?

Has something gone wrong?

He stood up, preparing himself to avoid Charlotte and Fitch and find a corner to answer the call.

Charlotte trembled slightly at the same moment, then gazing meaningfully at the sight of Greg’s back moving away from her, muttering, “Seems like this chess game is finally going to end.”

Greg went to the corner of the large main hall and fished out his communications device.

“Section Chief Winston, what’s wrong? Do you have something to ask me?” Greg inquired softly.

This time, it wasn’t noisy on Winston’s end. Instead, it was unbelievably quiet, as silent as death... death...

An ominous sense of foreboding rose in him, and Greg’s heart sank.

“Greg,” Winston’s hoarse voice sounded over the communications device. He uttered with slight difficulty, “Wilde... He beat us to it. He’s already grasped the Law known as ‘Eventuality.’”

Greg nearly crushed the communications device. A buzzing now felt in his mind and he heard nothing after that.

Winston held the communications device and observed the battle in the distance. Joseph who had initially held the upper hand now found himself in a dire situation on the battlefield.

Joseph condensed a huge wall of glowing aether to block the strange black fog-like and highly destructive substances derived from the Law of Eventuality.

However, when Joseph’s aether came into contact with the Law, the

glowing wall disappeared.

Even aether had an eventuality.

There was a limit to the aether in Joseph's body. Once it was exhausted, it would be Joseph that met his eventuality.

The Great Radiant Knight was forced backward over and over. But each time he turned to look behind him, at Norzin, and... his daughter, he would once more condense a powerful aetheric wall of light.

This time, he was no longer consuming the aether from around him. Instead, it was produced by the burning of his own life force.

Only the life force of a Supreme-rank could resist the Law of another Supreme-rank.

"Joseph..." Winston muttered his old friend's name softly.

After clenching his fist, he calmly spoke to Greg on the other end of the call, "The situation has changed. This isn't Secret Rite Tower's orders but my own personal decision. Please immediately ask Mr. Lin for help. Investigations, observing... All of that can go to hell."

He suddenly felt tears welling up in his eyes. "Whatever it takes... Regardless of whatever price I have to pay. I just hope he can just pay a little attention to this place... to my comrade Joseph."

Greg heard the desperation in Winston's calm voice. And in a daze, his communications device fell to the ground.

The resounding clatter instantly returned Greg to his senses.

Boss Lin. Right, Boss Lin! He can definitely save Teacher! He said it before!

"Boss Lin, Boss Lin! I'll go at once! Just wait!" No longer caring for formalities, Greg rushed out from the corner and grabbed a servant to ask where the side hall was.

The nobles at the banquet cast strange looks at the aristocratic

youth who had suddenly lost his composure.

Charlotte noticed Greg's anxiousness and grinned.

While she didn't have any way of knowing the battle situation, as a believer who had personally witnessed the doctrine, she naturally had a connection with Wilde, who was the main preacher. She could definitely sense his ascension to true Supreme-rank.

And now, just by looking at Greg, she understood right away that Wilde had beaten Joseph to it.

"Let me through!" Greg pushed past the servants who had come over to inquire about the situation. "Get out of the way, all of you! I want to see Boss Lin!"

Greg was buzzing around like a headline fly, but those servants knew nothing, informed him that the side hall cannot be visited by guests unless invited, or tried persuading him to calm down.

How can I calm down! Greg roared in his heart. Finally, he saw the butler that led Lin Jie to the side hall.

Greg rushed over and grabbed the old butler while shouting, "Where's Boss Lin?! I need to find him! It's important! Where have you brought him?!"

The butler was dumbfounded, but he kept his cool and tried to be as patient as he could. "I'm sorry, Mr. Greg, Mr. Lin is dining with our Master and Young Miss. Please—"

Greg instantly chanted an incantation and conjured up his ceremonial knife which he held to the old butler's neck. Through gritted teeth, he hiss hysterically, "Tell me where the side hall is. Take me there!"

"Yes, yes..."

The butler had broken out in cold sweat from the threat and uttered, "I'll bring you there now. The side hall is this way..."

But during this time, his hand behind his back was preparing to pull

out an alarm buzzer.

But before he could finish his sentence, Greg muttered a second incantation and the butler's vision went bright before he lost consciousness. Now muddled and in a trance, he lowered his hands and said, "Please come with me."

Greg brought the butler all the way to the side hall entrance where the latter said, "Right here..."

Before the butler finished speaking, Greg had shoved him aside and rushed into the side hall, the young apprentice knight slamming the door open.

A ruckus of panicking voices of manor guards and servants chasing after came from behind.

After crashing through, the scene that Greg saw—Lin Jie reaching out to fiddle with a clock.

Winston hung up the call and looked toward Joseph and the few remaining knights who were constantly exhausting their life force. He had disobeyed Secret Rite Tower's instructions to continue holding the enemy back and issued his final order—

"All personnel, evacuate! Save yourselves!"

At this point, he could no longer inspire anyone.

There was no solution to Wilde's power.

He, or rather, 'he,' could instantly accelerate everything to its eventuality—complete annihilation.

Unless a Supreme-rank took action, everyone else under these circumstances would just be throwing away their lives.

Hearing their commander's order, the remaining despairing knights exchanged glances. Although they wanted to say something, they ultimately chose to leave.

In truth, they already knew that Joseph, who hadn't obtained the

power of Laws yet, could no longer deal with Wilde's assault. At this moment, he was just burning his life force away to protect the remaining forces of Secret Rite Tower.

Thus, they supported each other and quickly fled the battlefield.

Winston stared off into space with his communicator while the retrograde crowd passed by him.

After what seemed like a long time, he turned around and gazed at Norzin, which was enveloped in cold winter. He trudged on the snow toward the young lady that had just regained consciousness.

Squatting beside her, he said softly, "Melissa, your father... He was a true hero."

Chapter 371: Who Will Become Light

Wilde stretched his own domain to the limit, and at the same time his body continuously swelled as if it were being inflated. Waving tentacles emerged from the ground, slashing and destroying all around it.

He was like a huge mountain that wouldn't even be shaken by the blizzard.

Merely looking at it was more than enough to make one feel insignificant and hopeless.

However, there was nothing inconvenient about such a magnificent body. The black magician even felt that he had never been this limber in his life.

As his soul and will had already reached its eventuality, the power surging from death gently lifted his body as if it were a floating bubble.

As he continued rising, he reached a height where his field of vision could see all of Norzin as well as the gray wall of fog surrounding the entire world. At that instant, a realization truly emerged in his heart—Wilde, as a human, was indeed dead.

The new Wilde could be called a 'god.' He who had control over the eventuality of everything. Now, as long as 'he' wished for it, he could use all his strength to bring the whole of Norzin to its eventuality of complete destruction.

All that existed in his line of sight were mere ants that could be effortlessly crushed to pieces.

"Huu..."

'His' breath stirred up a violent wind, and 'his' every move raised

the ground. 'He' was capable of shattering everything in an instant, and at this moment, Wilde felt as if he had been born to dominate everything.

Joseph raised his head and stared at the writhing colossus in the sky. Panting heavily, he gave his all to raise his sword once more. The sword burned with white flames, but his hands began to tremble.

This wasn't fear. However, the bloody wounds on his body and the broken sword in his hand were like a mountain about to crush him at any moment...

The body of that divinely evil entity before him was like a huge tumor with countless tubes stuck into it. Thick, slippery tentacles of purple and black drenched in blood covered it.

Using several of its largest tentacles, it propped its massive body up, causing even more cracks to appear on the ground that already had several layers stripped off during the process of battle. The further breaking of the ground revealed the intersecting steel structures beneath it.

Floating in the sky, Wilde was now like a humongous ball of thread and also the head of a witch with snake for hair from legends that could petrify anyone with just one gaze.

Every tentacle was a part of his body.

Gloop...

Accompanying this strange sound, the human Wilde's face took shape on the top of this giant tumor, opening his eyes and looking down.

From above, this entity could see the entire battlefield. With sight at the level of Supreme-rank, he could easily see the faces of everyone on the battlefield, as well as their looks of fear and despair.

A cackling laugh resounded from within his body, and as the sound wave spread, several people that heard it screamed and fell dead.

“Such a wondrous feeling, overlooking the world. This is the power I’ve been seeking my entire life...” muttered Wilde before he suddenly remembered a familiar face.

A gentle smile and that indescribable gaze that seemed to transcend entire worlds of that scholarly young man.

Is this how the bookstore owner viewed the world?

Wilder thought to himself, *Could he also be like me... No, Mr. Lin far surpasses me, at unfathomable levels. How could I so easily be able to grasp how Boss Lin thinks that easily?*

Even having attained this much power, Wilde still didn’t dare think of Boss Lin’s realm.

Because being able to attain Supreme-rank had been entirely down to Boss Lin’s instructions and guidance. It was simply impossible to imagine how powerful the latter could be.

Wilde observed Joseph, who was both physically and mentally exhausted. This old adversary that had tangled with him for so many years was just an ordinary old man now. Having lost his armor and strength, his body was wet with sweat and melted snow. Those wrinkles, tired eyes, and white hair could no longer be covered by a strong and powerful body.

It was hard for Wilde to imagine that two years ago he had still been in hiding because of Joseph’s relentless pursuit.

But now... Things were entirely different.

Gazing at the dark battlefield, Wilde suddenly felt a child-like sense of anxiousness. He really wanted to end everything and quickly submit his completed homework to Boss Lin. Perhaps that existence might then lavish generous praise on him along with that gentle gaze.

Haa... No way, no. You’re being too greedy, Wilde, he told himself.

He only needed to humbly lower his head, offer up his all, and accept everything.

That should be enough... right?

The remaining knights retreating under Winston's orders didn't dare look back to continue watching Wilde as they went all out trying to escape the expanding domain.

Boom!

The ground split open as even more tentacles snaked out from the cracks, grabbing the knights before they could react, snapping their necks effortlessly as blood and viscera splattered everywhere like paint.

Melissa watched as entails fell together with the billowing snow, dousing her with the blood of her fellow knights and bringing about a strange burning heat.

However, Winston didn't stop at all. Still carrying Melissa who had just woken up on his shoulder, he dodged several tentacles and continued to run at full speed.

Snapping out of her daze, the young lady struggled and screamed, "Put me down! Let me go back! Didn't you say Joseph was a hero? Why are we running? Why aren't we saving him?! Why..."

"There's nothing we can do."

Winston felt as if a knife was being twisted in his heart as he said with difficulty, "You've already seen it for yourself. We can't help save your father with our strength. We can't even survive the aftershocks! Listen, he will be remembered by everyone as a hero..."

"I don't want that! I don't want a hero... I don't want Joseph to be a hero..." Melissa closed her eyes, tears rolling down her cheeks. "I only want my father to be alive," she choked out.

Winston fell silent momentarily, then said, "Unless..."

Melissa's sobbing voice faltered. "Unless?"

"Unless the bookstore owner is willing to lend us a helping hand,"

Winston said grimly.

“Bookstore... You mean Boss Lin?” Melissa winced at the name.

“Yes. Only he can save your father.”

Winston hesitated for a bit, but realized that Melissa was no longer a child after having gone through this hellish experience firsthand and should probably understand what it all entailed. “Secret Rite Tower has probably decided to give up Joseph. The only person who can save him is the bookstore owner who is observing everything.”

Squelch—

Warm blood from yet another knight torn apart by tentacles splattered on snow, creating wisps of steam.

But in that instant, Melissa’s frazzled mind came to a calm.

It had been several months since she first met him. Those dark abyss-like eyes of the bookstore owner and his bewitching voice sounded in her head once more—

“You want power? As long as you are able to gain enlightenment and endure this pain, these books will be the keys to open all those doors.”

Then, Boss Lin had handed her a book titled ***Door Key: Origins*** .

She reached out and flipped it open—

Strange characters rushed into her mind like a torrent, transcending time. The doors to the taboo were once again reopened as twisted symbols once again appeared before her eyes.

Suddenly, Melissa clutched her head and gritted her teeth. It was as if someone had used a red-hot shovel to stir her brain, causing her to feel an immense wave of pain. It was even more unbearable when facing the newly formed body of Wilde’s.

During this episode, Winston seemed to have put her down and asked anxiously, “Melissa, what’s wrong?”

With her cognition crumbling, Melissa crashed to the ground in pain...

—You want power?

Taboo knowledge in the book flowed continuously before her.

—As long as you are able to gain enlightenment and endure this pain...

“ARGHHH!” Melissa screamed.

—These books will be the keys to open all those doors.

The pain didn't stop at all and instead intensified.

Thump!

Melissa curled up on the ground, blood flowing from every single of her orifices that made for a horrific sight. She was drenched in cold sweat and shivering, yet tried her best to pry her eyes open and looked toward the center of the battlefield.

There, a cluster of white flames still lit up in the raging darkness. Though small, it seemed capable of illuminating the entire world.

At the same time, the world deconstructed and reassembled before her again.

The countless incantations of taboo characters flitting before her were from the contents of the books that Boss Lin had given her... Akin to a bridge that allowed to reach whichever place she wanted to go.

The bookstore owner had said, “Don't be afraid. It's the price you must pay to open this door. The future you will definitely be grateful to the present you.”

Endless time and finite fate intertwined at this moment.

Somewhere along her fate, within that gloomy bookstore. Her deepest intrinsic essence had been forcibly dug out, filled with that

strange void matter, and transformed into the cornerstone of all things. From then on, as long as she wished, she could instantaneously seize a certain ability she required.

However, this cornerstone had restrictions and could only be used with regards to the concept of ‘knight.’

Melissa’s eyes jerked wide open, and she felt her vision expanding continuously. She saw the world she’d deconstructed intersect and shatter as her gaze seemed to reach her father who was battling several thousand meters away.

Though her father, whom she respected and relied on the most, had yet to grasp the power of Law, his intrinsic essence had already broken through to Supreme-rank.

In other words, he was the highest existence for the concept of ‘knight’!

Dook Key’s ability activated the moment she saw her father. The shattered world around her spun, pulled away from the timeline, and pieced together from chaos to order, forming a concept named ‘Joseph.’

From the moment Joseph joined the knights of Secret Rite Tower as a young, talented genius; the very first mission he carried out; everyone he saved; every fallen enemy slain; every time he was criticized by superiors due to his stubbornness; the highs and lows of his entire life; every step he took become strong, reaching the point he was currently at.

Everything became clear to Melissa.

A short glimpse of her father’s life flashed before her like a slideshow. Her father’s entire past engraved in the river of time surged into her mind the moment Melissa had opened the ‘door.’

—Sacrifice.

This was the only word that could summarize the life of this Radiant Knight of Secret Rite Tower.

Always sacrificing himself without a single care.

Sacrificing his time, his ideals, his friends, his body... sacrificing everything.

Joseph was like a torch—never light itself, for he couldn't illuminate everyone forever. Beneath his cold, hard exterior was a burning heart that would continue to burn for others even if it was dug out. Even when turned into ashes, he would still use the lingering heat to warm others.

That's why... there would be so many who followed him with admiration, right?

"Burn," uttered Melissa in an eerily calm voice.

"W-what?" Winston was baffled. As he helped Melissa up, he noticed the young redhead's eyes suddenly glow. As if struck by a bolt of lightning, an uncanny sense made him tighten his grip on the girl's hand.

Every Supreme-rank existence would have a self-formed domain that could change the laws of the world.

Just like the present Wilde, who had a conceptual Law of 'Eventuality.'

Joseph also had his own Law, but those concepts were still floating around him, and he didn't yet have time to gather them to form his domain.

But... they could still be seized.

"I said, Father's domain is Burning."

Drawing her sword, Melissa gently pushed Winston aside and stood up slowly.

The ominous sensation in Winston's heart intensified. He reached out to hold her. "How do you know that?"

"You just said that only Boss Lin can help us... Ha, Boss Lin did

help us, but I only remembered it now...” Melissa laughed self-deprecatingly and muttered as if she had just woken up from a dream, “I see. The reason he gave me those books then was so that I can help my father today.

“He’s right. The future me would be grateful to the present me.” She gazed at the center of the battlefield. Taking a deep breath, she whispered to no one in particular, “—Thank you.”

Winston’s eyes widened as a realization came over him. “No...”

“I am going to save him.”

Melissa coughed twice and wiped some blood from the corner of her mouth.

Turning to Winston, she said resolutely, “None of those people he sacrificed everything to save in the past have turned around to save yet. So now... now I’ll be the one to save him! The daughter who never understood her father saving him. That makes sense, doesn’t it?”

The girl’s blue eyes gazed through her father’s life and deconstructed everything about him.

At this moment, via the key, she had already comprehended the domain that her father hadn’t yet been able to complete. The Supreme-rank Law was being constructed on her.

But at the same time, her Pandemonium-rank body couldn’t withstand this massive power.

Once activated—

BOOM!

Raging flames wrapped around Melissa in an instant, and her wounds began to heal. At the same time, an immense force gradually tore her body apart, turning her completely unrecognizable.

“Melissa!!!” Amidst Winston’s panicked shouts, the girl shook off

everything. Carrying her father's unfinished power, she became a streak of light that shot forth and split open the dark battlefield.

Chapter 372: Sparks

Winston wasn't able to react in time as he reached out and only grabbed at air. Only his fingertips had managed a slight brush with the girl's red hair.

"Melissa!" Winston shouted as he chased after her. However, reemerging tentacles once more halted his advance and forced him to deal with them first.

Moreover, a scary phenomenon had occurred. Humanoid forms rose up from the muddy ground and were pouncing on the living. These were the remnant souls and lingering resentment of Corpse Devouring Sect members that had died and were sacrificed. Now, they were being condensed back into form by the newly Supreme-rank Wilde.

"Damn it!"

Winston couldn't help but curse. He had killed those wraiths, only to discover that the path Melissa had previously cleared was now blocked by tentacles once more and the expanding domain was still approaching.

He could only watch helplessly as the tiny flames in the distance were forced to retreat by the enemies all around.

Winston took a deep breath and felt that this was utterly ridiculous. "This father and daughter... are just so fucking alike! I don't care! Go ahead if you want to save the world! Such eagerness to seek death..."

Still cursing, he turned to leave. But after two steps, he couldn't help glancing back.

Please, come back alive...

Melissa tightened her grip on her sword as her rapidly changing field of vision narrowed.

Her gaze was locked firmly on the cluster of white flames glowing within the darkness. Pressing forward, she broke through all obstructions in her path, leaving a distinct streak of fire in the darkness.

Unlike Joseph's flames of pure white, the raging flames on Melissa's body were crimson like the rays of a setting sun. It was impossible to discern if this color came from her hair, aether, or her fading life...

Krackk...

Melissa could hear the sound of her bones breaking and her skin shattering. This was a pain that the will of an ordinary person wouldn't be able to bear. She could only give her all and grit her teeth—which she could no longer tell if she had any because her body was already burning away.

But at the same time, the Law she had obtained through 'door key' became clearer.

The birth of a new domain required comprehension and construct, which was to Supreme-ranks, a long process.

However, in this battle, Wilde had gained enough understanding about 'Eventuality' via the deaths and sacrifices of Corpse Devouring Sect members to have taken the lead.

On the other hand, Joseph was still missing the final piece of the puzzle.

And now, Melissa, who had mastery of sources of knowledge and the ability to learn at super speeds, had obtained this final puzzle piece from her father, the man who stood at the apex of the concept of 'knight.'

Now, I just need to convey this understanding to my father... Melissa thought.

Wilde's newly formed domain had expanded to cover close to the entire battlefield and was about to reach the barriers of the Dream Creator.

Once it reached the edges, the barrier would collapse and even the Dream Creator machines would be destroyed. And because there was presence of a Law, Secret Rite Tower might be caught within, let alone the city of Norzin which would be the first to bear the brunt.

Evidently, even as a Supreme-rank transcendent being, Wilde's strength was off the charts.

"Give up, Joseph."

From above, the face on Wilde's massive body revealed a mocking smile, the dark purple tentacles surging all over making for an abnormally hideous sight.

His voice reverberated through the battlefield. "You know very well that we were both chosen by Boss Lin... That is our fate. Like twins entangled in a mother's womb fighting for nutrients, only one of us can walk out of this battlefield alive.

"And the condition for survival is Boss Lin's objective of having us meet here. So that one will rise as a Supreme-rank."

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

White flames continuously flickered and exploded all around Wilde's massive body. From a distance, it looked like a spectacle of tiny stars extinguishing.

It was the light from Joseph's aether colliding with Wilde's Law of 'Eventuality.'

"Haaaaaaaaaah—"

Veins all over Joseph's body were protruding as every single muscle of his bulged to the limit. Moving at high speed, he roared furiously and cut off parts of Wilde's body continuously as if he was a giant that just won't fall, yet at the same time like a candle flickering in the wind, on the brink of being extinguished.

After hearing Boss Lin's name, Joseph raised his head and looked up, his gaze sharp like a sword stabbing at Wilde's face.

“It’s just that there’s a difference between us.” Wilde gave a gurgling laugh before continuing, “Boss Lin chose me to spread his gospel, whereas he chose you as a trial for me.

“This is a trial for me to overcome the past. Only by defeating the fear from my unsophisticated past would I be able to grow... Don’t you think so too, Joseph?”

BAM!

Joseph was struck by a huge tentacle and was sent flying before hitting the ground and tumbling multiple times before finally stopping himself by sticking his sword into the ground.

The Great Radiant Knight raised his sword and stared calmly at Wilde before rushing up once more.

“That’s a good look in your eyes.” Wilde chuckled, “Want me dead? Then come at me. I won’t kill you completely. Instead, I’ll devour you and turn you into my nourishment... become a part of this evildoer.”

He knew Joseph very well. Such an outcome would undoubtedly be more painful for him than dying, and it would allow the old knight to unleash his greatest strength.

Such actions differed from Wilde’s usual style of craft and caution. But perhaps because victory was close at hand and having his power swell so abruptly, Wilde had a slight change in mentality.

On the other hand...

Wilde surveyed the entire battlefield once more.

Everywhere affected by his domain of ‘Eventuality’ had reached their final point.

At the end of it all, everything and anything would just end up being destroyed and broken down.

I have everything under control!

While Wilde had this thought, he suddenly frowned.

Traces of a red flame had appeared within the darkness of Eventuality.

This fire was clearly so weak, yet it couldn't be doused.

Little sparks, like fuses, were rapidly igniting and burning their way here.

"That is..." Wilde was near omniscient in his own domain. He could clearly sense the situation all around him and control everything within.

However, he realized that he couldn't not interfere with those sparks.

Wilde's eyes widened and he took a closer look, witnessing the broken and burning figure of a girl breaking through the seal of Eventuality and approaching him.

Joseph's... daughter? Melissa?

Wilde's pupils narrowed. He willed the surrounding Eventuality to press down on that girl, only to find that his domain wasn't effective!

Impossible! What is that?! That's... the aura of Joseph's Law?!

Although Wilde did not know what was happening exactly, he immediately understood that he absolutely couldn't let her come into contact with Joseph!

A wave of black annihilative substance instantly swarmed toward Melissa. This blackness represented the domain of Eventuality. Akin to demons baring fangs and brandishing claws, it was everywhere like a swarm of locusts, enveloping the flames and extinguishing the light.

But!

The current of darkness enveloped Melissa as if she was a pebble,

yet in the next second, a steaming crack appeared on the surface of darkness, widening gradually before a red hot stream of flames erupted from it.

BOOM!

Wilde's Eventuality, that could annihilate everything, was cracked open like an egg—and flames hatched from it.

Melissa's lustrous red hair fluttered slightly in the blaze, blending with the burning flames and making her appear like a scarlet lotus blooming within hellfire. Tiny specks, that were the light of life, swirled around her, which was jarring in the pitch-black background.

Her skin had already been reduced to ashes and her body had practically turned into a ball of flame.

Only the girl's face remained as beautiful as ever, her green eyes clear and sparkling like gemstones.

"Melissa?!"

As Joseph, who had been sent flying once more, raised his sword to go again, he suddenly noticed the fire that had broken through the final layer of the domain of Eventuality. Then, he froze on the spot when he realized that it was his daughter who should have been far away from the battlefield.

His expression twisted hideously as he roared at the top of his lungs, "What are you doing here! Go back! Go back right now!!!"

Joseph tried taking a step forward, but staggered and fell to his knees due to injuries and coughed out blood. At the same time, his sword clattered to the ground.

Then, Joseph started to tremble violently. He was the owner of this Law. How could he not feel it? How could he not know...

The flames on Melissa's body were formed by burning her aether and life force.

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

Wilde continuously willed his tentacles and vast amounts of the annihilative darkness at Melissa, but they were incinerated by the flames on her body.

The girl's appearance could still be vaguely made out as the flames around her exploded and scattered over and over under the domain of Eventuality's barrage, teetering on the brink of collapse.

But regardless of how powerful these attacks were, Melissa's advance couldn't be halted.

She just looked at her father, dragging that heavy flame forward, and further forward.

The latter's eyes widened. He had completely lost his aura as the dependable Great Radiant Knight of the past. Right now, he was just an ordinary father staggering over and shouted soundlessly—His voice had also been swept away by the tides of Eventuality, turning into nothingness.

“Melissa!!!”

Joseph furiously tore apart everything that stood in his way. Finally, he arrived before the ball of flames and came to a stop.

Besides the dissipating halo of aether, only the beautiful outline of the young lady extending her hand stubbornly remained.

Joseph trembled as he spread his arms to embrace his daughter.

The flames collapsed upon contact.

At the same time, the incomplete Law became complete. The girl who had already exhausted her life force... turned into ashes.

And Joseph's outstretched arms caught nothing but these ashes.

Chapter 373: Start A Prairie Fire

A smile appeared on Melissa's face with the fire. Her eyes, resplendent as gemstones, curved into crescents. She opened her eyes as if she was about to say something and her beautiful brows froze for a moment before being swallowed by the darkness.

Sparks lingered near Joseph's fingertips before dissipating into the cold wind.

The young knight's outstretched hand stopped dead in midair, turning to ash that swirled with the snow and scattered in all directions, away from her father's hand.

Time seemed to stand still as Joseph could only stare blankly as his lovely daughter turned to ash in front of him.

BOOM—

The domain with the concept 'Burning' rapidly arrived and condensed on his body as white flames that seemed capable of incinerating everything. In an instant, the flames burned more brightly than ever and spewed out in all directions, but Joseph could no longer feel anything.

The tough-as-nails knight, who had never been weak in his entire life, felt like something was stuck in his throat. His mouth opened and closed like a fish gasping for air, but he could not utter a complete sentence—

"Me-Melissa..." He choked out the name of his own child.

He knew how painful it was to burn one's own life force. Yet Melissa had crossed half the battlefield all the while withstanding the barrage of Wilde's Supreme-rank domain.

Burning up her body with fire and never faltering.

However, such a strong child—his kind, cute, smart, hardworking, mischievous, beautiful, brave Melissa—hadn't been favored by fate... In the end, she could not reach her father's arms.

"Melissa... I'm sorry."

Great sorrow drowned Joseph. His eyes, which had long dried up for countless years due to the grueling training and tempering since his youth, filled with tears instantly.

He took deep breaths, but the surrounding air seemed to have become frozen, preventing him from taking in any more oxygen.

It was as if his everything that had always made him carry on living had left him along with those ashes.

As his vision clouded up with tears, images of Melissa's smile and memories of her flashed through Joseph's mind. Gradually, these seemed to overlap with the face of her equally young and brave mother.

Melissa's mother was once a Great Radiant Knight, as well as a comrade that had fought alongside Joseph countless times.

He still remembered... When she was young, Melissa hated her mother because of her strictness and her expectations.

"Darya..."

Melissa's mother, a fellow Great Radiant Knight had died in Joseph's arms—

["Joseph, I'm dying." Darya smiled and reached out to touch his cheek. "Forgive me. I can only let you take care of our child alone... I-I hope to see Melissa become a true knight..."]

At that time, Joseph thought that he would be able to protect everyone as long as he was strong enough.

Thus, he trained himself with all his might, went on missions nonstop, often hovering between life and death situations. In short, he put the work of Secret Rite Tower first in order to numb the pain

in his heart. His temper got worse, but his personality became increasingly upright and straightforward.

He'd followed his wife's wish, strictly demanding that Melissa become a Great Radiant Knight like her mother.

He never imagined that on this day, Melissa really became the embodiment of a true Radiant Knight. She was so dazzling, so gentle, just like her mother—And like her mother, died in Joseph's arms.

“Arghh—”

What was the use of being strong?

So what if he was a knight?

In the end, he couldn't even keep anything...

Joseph knelt on the ground and covered his face as he cried bitterly in the burning white flames, his tears evaporating before they hit the ground due to the high temperatures.

When the Demon Sword Candela drew him into painful illusions that tormented him for days and nights countless times, Joseph had thought that was hell.

Yet, he never imagined that this world would be even more frightening than hell...

“W-what...”

Winston turned around upon hearing something and was rooted to the spot.

In the distance, a blazing explosion of flames lit up the battlefield for a moment. But when darkness enveloped it once more, that beautiful scarlet flame had completely disappeared.

Winston's heart sank, and he was entirely in a daze.

He couldn't believe that the talented girl's life would just come to

an end so easily here, but...

But halfway through his daze, he roused up and tugged at his own hair while gazing at the white sea of flames.

As an old friend, he knew about Joseph's past.

Though Joseph had always been as dazzling as the sun in the eyes of outsiders, Darya's death was a darkness always hidden within his heart. Joseph had always blamed himself and even wished he had died during that ill-fated mission as well. And that was the reason why the 'Indomitable Sacred Flame' didn't fear death.

Since then, Melissa had become the main pillar of his life, which allowed him to return from the brink of death over and over.

But... What if Melissa died?

Surging white flames pushed the tide of darkness outward with unstoppable force.

From above, Wilde overlooked his adversary. He didn't ridicule Joseph for his weak and miserable demeanor. Instead, there was even a look of pity on his face.

The pitiful fellow who couldn't discard his emotional burden was destined to lose.

As for Wilde himself?

He did reveal a soft side to his disciples in the past, but what came from it was betrayal and death; a knife that stabbed and twisted into his soft side.

From the day he personally used the ceremonial knife to kill his most valued disciple under Boss Lin's guidance, he had already woken up from that dream of self-deception and cut off all his feelings.

Wilde found Joseph's current disposition rather laughable. With a low chuckle, he asked, "Tsk, ts, ts. Does it hurt... Joseph? Is it unbearable?"

“This is the path you chose. This is everything you wanted to protect. Take a look, what exactly have you protected?”

Wilde didn't waste this opportunity and tried to use words to further break Joseph's defenses with his words.

The most important thing right now wasn't to mock his adversary but to kill Joseph when he crumbled.

When Wilde spoke, the annihilative darkness of 'Eventuality' surged like a raging wave. Squirming tentacles poised to strike as he prepared to personally end Joseph's life.

The darkness representing 'Eventuality' wasn't able to quickly kill off Joseph.

'Eventuality' actually accelerated organic life to the end point, which was dissolving into nothingness. However, Joseph had already reached Supreme-rank, and every Supreme-rank transcendent individual had a 'pseudo-eternal' life.

The reason why it was 'pseudo-eternal' was, of course, because nothing in this world was truly eternal (except the great Boss Lin). Even Supreme-ranks only existed for a relatively long time.

Even though 'Eventuality' could make Joseph disappear, it would take a long time to do so. Thus, Wilde was only using his Law to weaken his adversary as much as possible so that his main body could attack.

These tentacles that seemed to have extended from hell itself rushed, shot forward, and attacked Joseph relentlessly.

Joseph was still whimpering, still unable to accept his daughter's death. The mass of tentacles wrapped around him, forming a squirming ball, and the white glow for his flames seemed like they were about to disappear.

Wilde concentrated his strength and even shrunk his 'Eventuality' Domain.

Seeing the still motionless Joseph, his lips curled upward—

“!!!”

Suddenly, he felt a burning sensation in his brain.

Wilde hadn't yet been able to react, but as if coming into contact with boiling water, he subconsciously wanted to pull his tentacles away.

A lava-like torrent flowed out from under the tentacles that wrapped around Joseph, turning wherever it went into scorched earth.

Wilde's eyes opened wide as he watched the tentacles restraining Joseph crackle and melt away like fragile paper. It was as if they had been incinerated by invisible flames that were still spreading. All Joseph could do was cut off those tentacles from himself.

Joseph had stopped crying. He picked up his sword and got to his feet slowly. There was no longer any fire around his body. His grizzled hair had turned pure white now and fluttered silently in the cold wind. His body was hunched and he appeared incomparably aged.

The domain of “Burning” had been completely formed.

But there was already no more fire.

Joseph looked up and raised his sword. His eyes were dead, but something invisible seemed to burn within them.

“Wilde... I'LL KILL YOU!”

Chapter 374: What Did You Say?

The extremely low-hanging thick and dark clouds appeared as if they would come crashing down at any moment. Such abnormal phenomena made it seem like the end of the world was fast approaching. Lightning crackled every so often, yet the sound was drowned out by the howling snowstorm.

Krackk...

Cracks had started to appear on the second Dream Creator barrier once more, indicating that it wouldn't hold out for too long.

The ground shook, and spider web-like fissures covering a wide area kept expanding.

Backing off slightly, Winston took a deep breath and reached out his hand to grasp the air. He could clearly feel that the temperature of the entire battlefield was rising continuously.

Caroline, chief of the Logistics Division, who had rushed over from the rear, was standing next to him. The woman had a lit cigarette, and blood was streaming from her shut eyes.

As the chaotic aether field within the battlefield had already far exceeded the scope of the aether surveillance monitors, Caroline had to personally mobilize in order to grasp more accurate information.

"Huuu..." Caroline blew out a stream of smoke while rubbing the corners of her eyes. Although Eyes of Gazing could directly obtain the information she wanted, it was rather strenuous and would cause some damage.

Wearily, she said, "Joseph has finally completed his own Law. A second Supreme-rank domain has been formed. Now... it's no longer a place for us minor characters."

“...”

Even though this meant that Joseph might have a chance to turn the tables, Winston didn't feel the least bit pleased.

The reason why the 'Indomitable Sacred Flame' got his name was Joseph's signature technique of burning aether to produce a white blaze.

Admirers and followers of Joseph claimed that these flames were the light of justice.

Yet now, it was completely dark on the other side of the barrier.

Winston stared into the distance, having understood what Caroline meant—What was about to unfold was a real battle between Supreme-rank, a collision between Laws and a clash between concepts that transcended everything.

He eyed the main supporting pillar of the Dream Creator's barrier and worried how long it would last. If this final layer shattered and Secret Rite Tower didn't intend to awaken the one in the Central District, then perhaps the whole of Norzin might really be destroyed.

In his dazed state, Winston said what was on his mind.

Caroline jokingly replied, “At least you won't have to worry about the punishment that might result from your earlier act of insubordination.”

Winston scoffed. He didn't want to give a damn about Secret Rite Tower anymore. Glancing at the knights who had managed to escape death and were resting behind him, Winston felt that he had already done whatever he could.

When it comes to being a chief, I'm no worse than you, Joseph!

Winston couldn't help but chuckle when he recalled the open and covert strife between the two of them in the past. However, the smile on his face still faded rather quickly. He gripped his communications device tightly and had a complicated look on his

face. Greg had yet to reply, but Winston had a rough understanding of the whole affair now.

The motive of the bookstore owner had been to let Joseph and Wilde rely on each other to ascend to Supreme-rank.

All other factors had been to bring about the success of these two. When the goal was achieved, all people and things involved in this process were considered trash that could be abandoned at any time.

The cruelty of these higher existences was truly suffocating.

Within the barrier isolated from the world, dream fissures opened from the space constantly bombarded by Supreme-rank aether. Low level dream beasts that took the opportunity to sneak through were instantly destroyed by the domain of Eventuality the moment they entered.

The man-made city of Norzin had been completely flattened, and the metal frame that supported the city from beneath the ground had been exposed and quickly rusting away as they swayed and gradually broke.

Heavy snow that filled the sky was vaporized by the high temperatures before hitting the ground, and even the air had started to distort.

With sword in hand, Joseph stood erect. There were no longer any blazing flames around him, but surging heat waves rippled, burning everything around him.

Burning without firewood was as resolute as seeking death.

The expanding domain of Burning rapidly cleared everything. With Joseph as the center, a huge empty circle gradually formed. Joseph, who had unleashed his domain of Burning at the cost of his life, seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of aether.

Although there was no light, the pitch-black substances vaporized instantly and disappeared as if they were shadows hit by the sun's rays.

Yet, the darkness seemed endless as more and more continued to surge forward.

Wilde sneered and proclaimed loudly, “Eventuality is an unchangeable fate; it is the true end. Even if you burn everything, what you see at the end would still be an eventuality. The concept of my domain is above yours, and you will never be able to defeat me.

“Therefore, what you and your daughter did was all for naught.”

However, Joseph did not seem to hear this at all. Instead, he was staring at Wilde calmly. His severely chipped sword was dim, yet it made instinctive alarm bells go off in Wilde’s mind. The black magician had a premonition and felt his heart shudder. “You...”

Joseph suddenly moved.

He did only one thing—stepping forward and slashing at Wilde with his sword.

There clearly wasn’t any light at this moment, yet everyone gazing at this battlefield seemed to witness light.

At that moment, a huge white figure with a continuously changing shape akin to a living flame on the battlefield appeared behind Wilde and also slashed out!

[Soul Realm Image] — magnified million-fold!

And this time, it was Supreme-rank!

Wilde had a look of shock. He could read the words from Joseph’s gaze: “I don’t need to destroy your domain. I just need to kill you!”

That’s right! Wilde had mastery over the concept, but he wasn’t the concept itself.

Therefore, he had only been able to say, “I will become destruction,” and not “I’ll become eventuality”!

This, too, was something Joseph understood after he ascended to

Supreme-rank. Even if one ‘became a god,’ he would still evolve according to the rules of transcendent power.

The flow of aether never changed.

Knights used life and death experiences to temper their physical bodies, so even a Supreme-rank knight with a Supreme-rank body would still fail to complete a simple spell.

Similarly, magicians trained their minds through meditation. A Supreme-rank magician might have mastery over all spells, but they would still have weak ordinary bodies.

In other words, Joseph had already grasped Wilde’s weakness.

Although Wilde had craftily used a sacrificial technique to change his body, in truth, his true body was still extremely weak!

The long sword was pointed directly at Wilde’s face atop his massive grotesque body. The domain of Burning that had been compressed to its extremes emitted a dazzling radiance, akin to the brilliant sun!

“Give it a try then. Since you’ve focused all your strength into the Soul Image, your main body should be rather weak now, right?” Wilde sneered.

Once more, he swept up rampant winds of snow, flesh, blood, and sacrificed souls along with the annihilative darkness to resist Joseph’s burning.

At the same time, he willed countless tentacles to pierce Joseph’s body.

The two Supreme-rank transcendent beings clashed with their fullest might in that instant.

Black and white intersected, melding the two into a grayish ball of light. Shock wave carrying the fragments of the entire city slammed into the dream barrier. Unable to withstand this force, the Dream Creators crumbled.

The boundary between dream and reality was utterly wrecked.

The energy that poured out was like a flood, drowning and flattening everything in its path.

This time, bearing the brunt of it wasn't a constructed dream world but the actual Norzin.

Wilde heard Joseph's final roar, or perhaps he didn't. Gradually, he was no longer able to see the outside world, and only the painful sensation of being burned remained—

Wilde's huge body burst like a balloon, and his scarred head was lopped off by the white giant's sword and stomped flat.

Milky-yellow brain matter was squeezed out, and at the same time, the white giant was dissolved into nothingness by the domain of Eventuality.

"No... Impossible..." Wilde muttered with great difficulty, his eyes that were opened gradually losing their luster.

"Nothing's impossible." Within the silent ruins, Joseph struggled to walk through the chaotic winds as he dragged his sword along. His voice was hoarse and he no longer looked human. Half his body had disappeared and his strength completely exhausted. At this moment, even an ordinary person could take him down.

But his burning wasn't over yet.

Squelch!

Joseph raised his sword and stabbed it into Wilde's head, ending the latter's life.

The black magician didn't even manage to finish his last words as his eyes turned completely dim. At the same time, the domain of Eventuality disappeared with the wielder's death as the darkness quickly disintegrated and returned to nothingness.

"Melissa..."

Joseph looked at his trembling hands and saw that his body was gradually reconstructing. Yet, his heart still felt empty. Even if he had killed Wilde, it didn't make him feel relieved at all.

After losing the person he wanted to protect the most, the power he had obtained was so useless and laughable.

"I, gurf—What...?"

Joseph suddenly felt a pain in his chest. He lowered his head and saw a violet tentacle, wrapped in dark annihilative matter, had stabbed into his chest and pierced through his beating heart!

"Pfft, ba-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

Acute and all too familiar laughter sounded behind him... No, from all directions.

"Foolish Joseph, poor Joseph. You didn't really think that I was dead, did you? Ha-ha-ha-ha...!"

A ball of sludge-like substance emerged from the ground and formed the aged gentlemanly face of the black magician. A cynical smile was plastered on his face as if he was reveling in plaudits for a show he just directed. "How is my ability to integrate with death compared to back then?"

"Haah..." Joseph could not say anything. He gazed at the snowflakes falling from the sky and his heart was calm.

Wilde regained his original form and walked up to Joseph and pinched the latter's face, revealing a graceful smile. "This is destiny, Joseph. It's a reward for my loyalty to Boss Lin. Do you know? The purpose of establishing the Corpse Devouring Sect was to spread Boss Lin's gospel. And just now, when I became a Supreme-rank, I wondered if I had done enough.

"Can I be enough to repay Boss Lin? Apparently, it's not enough.

"My devotion isn't enough! I need more. Even more!"

Wilde had the look of a raving lunatic. "So... Guess what was the

first thing I did after becoming Supreme-rank?”

Joseph couldn't answer. His consciousness was close to dissipating.

“That's right!” Wilde answered his own question excitedly, nearly losing his composure. “I immediately set up a ritual and sacrificed myself to Boss Lin! Hahahahaha!”

Lunatic... Even though Joseph knew how crazy Wilde was, this was the word that still popped up in his mind.

“And it was till the moment you killed me that this unparalleled ritual was officially completed.

“A sacrificer sacrifices himself. The one receiving the sacrifice has the right to accept it or not. If Boss Lin is willing to accept my life, I will become his eternal dependent. If he doesn't accept it...

“Then, I'll be resurrected.”

Wilde lowered his head and gazed at Joseph. Chuckling, he patted the knight's shoulder and bowed. “Thank you, old friend.”

Is this... the end?

Death was upon him, but Joseph felt a sense of relief.

A16 Manor.

Baam!

Just as Lin Jie was about to tell Miss Ji that this caterpillar was rather docile and not the least bit scary, the side hall's door was suddenly forcibly slammed open.

“Boss Lin!”

Lin Jie turned around and was surprised to see Greg, who was supposed to be waiting outside.

Ji Zhixiu nervously eyed Boss Lin's fingers above the Clock-wheel Worm. Because its owner had turned his head, his fingers moved

away slightly, making Ji Zhixiu heave a sigh of relief.

Ji Bonong frowned. “You are... Greg?”

Greg ignored him and rushed to Boss Lin anxiously. “Please, please save—”

There was a faint racket of guards and servants who were following behind. It seemed that they had rescued the butler who had been thrown to the side and were preparing to rush in.

Lin Jie didn’t hear him clearly. “What did you say?”

Rumble... Boom...!

A loud sound was accompanied by violent shuddering of the ground, causing the crystal chandelier in the room to shake and clink. Blinding light flickered outside the window, and the entire house shook.

WTF?

An earthquake???

The bewildered Lin Jie staggered slightly, and he subconsciously tightened his grip on the small clock in his hand, accidentally turning the cog counter-clockwise with his fingers.

Chapter 375: The Fluttering

Time.

One of the supreme Laws that humans could never grasp or master. As lower dimensional creatures that had never seen before a higher dimension, they had no way to comprehend it.

That was why Andrew's family could only use the method of capturing the Clock-wheel Worm. Using these transcendent creatures that lived in the timeline and maintained its flow, that family had indirectly obtained the power to grasp the rules of time.

However, Haniel, who arrived in this world as an evolved form of the Clock-wheel Worm, the Chronos Butterfly, had the authority to control time and simply didn't need to comprehend anything about time itself.

Just jumping between dimensions was as instinctive to her as walking.

With such a unique ability, she could look down on even those of the same level and view others as insignificant. Even after joining the Path of the Flaming Sword, even Michael wouldn't give her direct orders.

Despite this, in essence, she was just but a tiny bug of a higher-dimensional world. Yet, to humans, she was the master of time.

It ought to have been like this...

However, this all changed in that brief encounter with that scary black-haired young man.

She never imagined she would ever find herself in such a sorry state. Her actual body had been caught, and she hadn't been able to resist in any way. Moreover, she had nearly been entirely devoured, managing to escape with a part of her body thanks to her instincts.

“Power... Give me back my power...”

She wailed in extreme pain and jumped across different timelines at rapid speed. Following her instincts, she searched for the culprit behind it all with the single-minded thought of asking the other party to return her strength.

Haniel had used up her entire life's strength just for escaping. Losing her body and power had caused her to fall into a semi-degenerate state, and currently she seemed to have returned to being an ignorant bug, just blindly following her instincts.

Suddenly, her eyes lit up. A suddenly flash of inspiration, like a thread formed by a weak light, was guiding her—

There!

Besides sensing the culprit that had devoured most of her power, there was also the obvious aura of her fellow species that she had wanted to save from the beginning!

Yes, that's right!

Hadn't she come to save her fellow kin?

Haniel, who wasn't much different from a regular insect now, had completely lost the ability to think rationally and was now charging straight to the tempting glow like a moth to fire.

“My power!” Haniel was overjoyed. With her tattered body, she leaped into the timeline.

In the side hall, the Ji father and daughter pair, as well as Greg, were all staring wide eyed at the clock Lin Jie held, whose second hand had been rotated backward by a significant amount.

Ji Zhixiu had a blank look on her face, the shock of this scene leaving her dumbfounded. She remembered that this device's capacity to rewind time... completely overlapped with the scale on the clock?

The anxious words that Greg wanted to say were stuck in his throat.

He was shocked to recognize that this ornate trinket was the secret treasure of the Andrew family that could manipulate time.

Don't tell me...

Before his thoughts even took shape, the torrent of time being reversed swept over in the next moment.

Haniel was midway through her jump, about to extricate her body from the crack of time and reach out to touch her imprisoned kind.

However, she sensed the flow of time had started to reverse!

With the accidental brush of Lin Jie's finger causing the second hand to move, the normal flow of time had come to an abrupt halt as if it had been cut off—

Then, the flow of time around Haniel's body crushed toward her like a closing wall trap.

Haniel had no time to think. She couldn't escape this time.

The Chronos Butterfly that had crossed several space-time axes was swept by the immense power of time as if she had been thrown into a washing machine and was tumbling nonstop.

Her body, which was made of countless rays of light, was pulled in all directions, instantly exploding in countless worms that splattered all over. In pain and full of unwillingness, Haniel relied on her strong willpower to gather her body together.

“No—!”

Haniel roared and struggled frantically amidst the continuous shattering and reconstructing.

Intersecting timelines were like a meat grinder, tearing her apart and mixing it all up. Akin to a ball of yarn being played with by a cat, Haniel crossed several timelines and was at many different time points all at once.

“Save me... Save me... Anyone... I don't want to die—”

Fear of death gripped Haniel as she desperately grabbed at every crack in the surging dimensional turbulence, trying to find an anchor point. At this moment, she was like a drowning person who had fallen into the ocean and was trying to clutch at anything that could offer her a respite.

However, the immense power of time being reversed was unstoppable. It was like the flow of water, from the most completed time to the shattered one.

Space-time was like a rolled-up towel of reality and dream folded together, forming a peripheral area riddled with holes that had fused with a man-made space that already existed.

At the same time, the gap between space and time completely closed. The two distorted walls crushed everything within to powder.

Like a water balloon that had been squeezed by extreme pressure, Haniel exploded, causing the power of Law to come gushing out and flowing into the surrounding dimensional rift at the death of this Supreme-rank!

As if having just experienced a long and mystical journey, Melissa opened her green eyes wide and watched the rapidly retreating world before her.

On the battlefield in the distance, a massive embodiment of evil was wreaking havoc, and facing it was a burly knight wrapped in a small white flame.

“What’s going on...” muttered Melissa, but her thoughts were quickly set aside because of the intense pain she felt throughout her body.

Right, she had... she had wanted to pass her understanding of Law to her father...

Melissa saw the flames burning all over her body and immediately returned to her senses. However, she vaguely felt that something was amiss. Shouldn’t she have reached her father already?

Was it all an illusion caused by my obsession... No. Now isn't the time to think about all that. All I need right now is to advance!

Melissa abandoned her thoughts and continued onward, revealing a relieved smile on her face.

But at the same time, she could also feel that her body could no longer hold on and death was approaching her soon.

In the distance, Joseph got to his feet once more after being knocked down. His face was blank, but his expression abruptly changed when he saw the familiar figure of the girl wrapped in crimson flames.

At this moment, even if he didn't understand what was happening, his paternal instincts made him run toward Melissa without a moment's hesitation.

"Melissa... Melissa!!!"

Joseph cried out and ran toward his daughter with all his might.

Wilde's eyes widened in anger as he immediately felt the unstable dimensional turbulence around him— *Why?!!*

The massive body let out an inhuman roar, tentacles waving as it directed the destructive darkness to attack the two knights again.

It doesn't matter, Wilde thought. My victory is already set in stone. I won't be affected even if time is rewound. This victory has already been destined! No one can change it!

Melissa's red hair danced with the flames, fusing together with the burning blazes. Standing within the darkness that represented Eventuality, she was like a blooming red lotus of hellfire.

"It's too late!" Wilde sneered, directing the dark tide to surge toward Melissa. "Your end has already been decided right from the start, and nothing will change this time!"

That's right, Melissa didn't hesitate at all. Once more, she burned her own life force to make the darkness around her retreat. As long

as she moved forward, she was destined to die before arriving.

But to Melissa, choosing death was never something to be afraid of. Nothing was scary as long as she could save her father.

The choice she made previously wouldn't change even if she was given the chance of a do-over.

Joseph roared, even more furiously than the last. Using all his strength, he split open the darkness obstructing him and rushed toward his daughter.

No—

Not like this—

Don't let Melissa die in front of me again!

Don't—

Joseph was getting closer to Melissa, but he was getting increasingly desperate as the power of Law started to get restored. The red-haired girl smiled at him, but the insurmountable distance of a few meters was like an unconquerable chasm.

His open arms would never be able to embrace his daughter.

“Bahahaha...! Useless, useless, useless! It's useless, Joseph. Even if we start over, the outcome will still be the same!” Wilde cackled with laughter, mocking their useless efforts.

Suddenly—

A massive power gushed out from the many tiny dream fissures all around. It was Haniel being pulled out by the torrent of time.

BOOM—

A Supreme-rank transcendent existence that could control time was squashed and exploded in an instant. Power of unquantifiable Law surged all around like a flood, causing the fragile barrier enchantment between dream and reality of the Dream Creators to

thoroughly collapse. The largest dream fissure within the area caused the entire dimension to distort.

At the same time, Norzin that had been ravaged multiple times by the two Supreme-rank transcendent beings was already on the verge of being destroyed. At this moment, the steel frame supporting the entire city was impacted once more.

Kraackk... Screech...

The metal frame was rapidly rusted by the domain of Eventuality, instantly becoming unable to support itself and snapped right in the middle.

The underground frame that supported the man-made city collapsed instantly, causing the entire subterranean layer to shift several hundred meters forward and collide.

Rumble...

The ground shook and tilted, and a huge invisible force suddenly pushed Melissa forward.

The girl's eyes widened in surprise. In the next second—

She fell into a warm, familiar, reassuring embrace.

Law formed and the burning stopped.

The powerful old knight's face was covered in tears. He revealed a blank expression as he hugged his child in disbelief.

“Melissa, Melissa... is that you?” The father's hands trembled as he hugged Melissa tightly, so worked up he couldn't speak properly, as if he was holding his own child for the first time. “Great, this is just great...”

“Dad... What do you mean is it me? Of course it's me! Your best daughter has come to save you!” Melissa stuck out her tongue, revealing an adorable smile as she raised her arms and hugged Joseph back.

Chapter 376: If It Be A Long Night, I'll Be Daybreak

The current of annihilative darkness was dispersed by the massive energy emitted from the dream fissure. This dream realm, which was both real and illusory, popped like a bubble following Haniel's implosion.

Amidst the loud rumble, the whole of Norzin tilted several degrees to the side.

Wilde's massive body was also impacted, causing many of his tentacles to snap as he was pushed back several thousand meters.

His eyes widened in shock as he watched Joseph and his daughter hug each other.

The outcome had been directly rewritten just because of an outburst of excessive energy!

This, in fact, wasn't the most unbelievable part. What was even crazier was that Wilde could sense that the power that scattered contained Law, a very complete and powerful one. Just a little leaking out due to death had been enough to injure him. This meant, a Supreme-rank far stronger than them had just recently fallen.

Wilde, a 'newbie' Supreme-rank that had only just mastered the Law of Eventuality, came face-to-face with a Supreme-rank transcendent existence, and his heart couldn't help but palpitate anxiously.

A Supreme-rank who had mastery over the Law of Time was definitely an absolute powerhouse among other Supreme-ranks. However, such a powerful transcendent existence had been killed by time in the blink of an eye.

Was there anyone who could do such a thing?

Wilde could already come to a conjecture without needing to think.

“Melissa... Just wonderful.” Hands that he hadn’t been able to grab before were now clutched tightly by Joseph.

At this moment, Joseph, a Supreme-rank that had comprehended the Law of his concept, was merely a father reunited with his lost daughter and hugging her tightly in ecstasy.

“Melissa...my Melissa...” The old knight muttered incoherently.

“Dad... Hehe, are you happy? In the past, it was always you protecting others. Now it’s my turn to save you...”

Melissa was held tightly in her father’s embrace as his warm tears dampened her shoulders. She lightly patted her father’s broad and trembling back, sensing for the first time such warm love from her father.

In the past, Joseph never expressed his emotions overtly nor verbally. He was like an unflinching boulder, only silently watching and expressing his strict expectations.

Melissa had always been displeased with her father’s negligence and protested in her own way.

But it wasn’t until this moment, when she felt Joseph’s uncontrollable trembling and the strength of his embrace, did she truly understand how much her father loved and valued her.

“I’m happy, of course I’m happy...” Joseph let go of Melissa slightly, happiness clearly showing on his tear-stained face. Gazing at his Melissa gently, he stroked his daughter’s cheeks and hair. “My daughter is all grown up and can stand on her own.”

Then he whispered, “Sorry Melissa, no milk today.”

Melissa froze, then felt a slight, sharp pain on her nape before her vision turned dark and she went limp.

“Good night. Have a sweet dream.” Joseph gazed at his daughter, whom he knocked out, with incomparable gentleness in his eyes. He

slowly stood up with the girl in his arms as the gentleness on his face gradually disappeared and a cold, unflinching expression returned.

Melissa subconsciously reached out and grabbed his clothes, struggling to mutter something indistinct.

“It’s okay, my daughter. It’s okay. Everything will get better...”
Joseph gently patted Melissa’s back as if he were comforting a baby.

Melissa relaxed her body and fell asleep in her father’s arms.

Joseph lifted her daughter in a cradle. He could still feel her daughter’s weak but still-existent breath as well as her slow but powerful heartbeat. The warmth of Melissa’s life was almost scalding.

Joseph felt more at ease than ever.

Burning... What can burn isn’t just life...

Joseph took a deep breath. Aether condensed as he activated the Secret Rite Tower sigil on Melissa’s body and silently chanted the teleportation incantation.

There was a flash of light as Melissa was teleported to the safety point set up by Secret Rite Tower.

Joseph picked up his sword again, his sharp eyes staring daggers at Wilde in the distance who had reestablished his domain. The black magician met his gaze.

The Law of Burning once more converged on Joseph’s body with an unstoppable momentum.

This time, both sides had revealed all their cards.

In the following battle, there was no other way except to use their fullest might!

Wilde coldly gathered his Law of Eventuality, knowing full well that this sudden change had disrupted his absolute advantage. Not only

had Melissa survived, but Joseph had calmed down as well. Moreover, his previous scheme to fake death through sacrifice had been rendered useless given the reversal in time.

Damn it...

Wilde knew that things weren't looking good. In the past, he might have already fled when faced with the same circumstances. In any case, since he had already grasped Supreme-rank power and had a pseudo-eternal life, it would be fine even if he had to wait another two more years to fight again.

As for face... Who the hell cared about that?

However, Wilde felt great indignation in his heart—

Why was Joseph favored? Why was he given a second chance?!

I don't believe it!!!

Even if there's a do-over, I will still win as before!

“Joseph, you can't beat my eventuality!” Wilde roared.

His body rejuvenated quickly as snaking tentacles propped up his massive body and made it squirm forward. Many huge moves appeared, densely packed and overlapping with each other. It sounded like a buzz of thousands of people chanting simultaneously, each individually completing high-level spells.

With the domain of Eventuality enhancing them, the power of these spells were magnified many-fold and launched in Joseph's direction.

He had to strike first!

Since they knew each other's trump cards, both of them would bet their lives in order to complete the final blow!

Joseph watched as the sea of tentacles and intimidating spells towered over him. Wilde's domain of Eventuality that had covered the entire battlefield had started to shrink as well. Wilde had

gathered all his strength to defeat Joseph.

The old knight raised his head. His eyes seemed to be burning with flames and emitting a pure white glow.

When Wilde's tentacles reached him, Joseph raised his sword—

It was burning all the same, just that the fuel was completely different.

Just as Melissa had learned from her super-speed learning of Door Key, the name 'Joseph' represented burning oneself; using sacrifice and protection as the source of strength.

Protection and sacrifice.

It wasn't any abstract concept but something that really existed. And that was the source and power of Joseph burning himself.

He had to protect Melissa and Norzin.

Everything he wanted to protect was behind him. So, how could he not give his all?

Joseph watched the tentacles whistling toward him and smiled. Then, he swung the burning great-sword in his hand.

Just like slicing a piece of tofu, the sea of Wilde's tentacles, annihilative darkness, and spells were cut apart!

The shaking ground beneath Winston's feet made him feel as if he were on a high speed rail that had put on the emergency brakes.

In a daze, he rubbed his head and looked around, sensing that something was off...

Noises of intense fighting still resounded from the battlefield. The Dream Creator and the barrier before him was split up, and knights behind were shouting loudly, requesting saving in this emergency.

Yes, the barrier broke. Then... What happened then?

A bewildered Winston stood rooted to the spot.

Something was definitely off. Winston didn't think anything was wrong with the scene before him just a few seconds ago, but he felt that he had forgotten something.

He had no choice but to turn his gaze to the more perceptive chief of the Logistics Division. However, he was surprised to discover Caroline kneeling on the ground and trembling violently. Quite a bit of blood dripped between the fingers of her hand covering her face.

Winston walked over to help her and asked, "What's the matter?"

Caroline took a deep breath and raised her head. Her eyes were bleeding, and she had an expression of utter shock. "Just now, haa... Someone meddled with time and made it rewind..."

The chief of the Combat Division who was usually calm and steady was dumbfounded. "W-what?"

Caroline bit back the pain and pointed to her eyes. "Information I saw via Eyes of Gazing.

"Some other Supreme-rank existence that suddenly appeared was caught by the reverse flow of time and torn to bits, thus interfering with the time reversal... which caused the battle between Wilde and Joseph to be rewritten."

What she said was extremely shocking, yet the manner she said it was so light it didn't feel real.

Anyone who witnessed this with their own eyes would think themselves dreaming.

Given such a degree of time reversal, other than people that saw the fluttering of the butterfly's wings or those who witnessed the time needle being turned, generally, nobody else would notice anything.

Just like Winston's loss of memory.

However, Caroline's Eyes of Gazing allowed her to capture the

information flow that dissipated in the surrounding space and time, allowing her to instantly obtain her lost memories. But at the same time, it also made her pay the price of near blindness.

Another Supreme-rank? Winston felt his scalp tingle.

If it was merely a reversal of time, the flow of fate wouldn't change and rewriting the battle would be out of the question.

So, on top of reversing time, a Supreme-rank was also killed? The death of that Supreme-rank transcendent existence was used to affect the entire battlefield?

The only being capable of doing all of this seemed to be that chess player away from the battlefield that was observing it all from start to end.

Is this the true power of that person...

Winston didn't dare imagine and just stared blankly at the battlefield in the distance.

With sword unsheathed, heating up the air around and causing it to ripple, Joseph cut forward with a sky-splitting slash, instantly breaking through the slippery tentacles that were covered with the annihilative darkness of Eventuality. Taboo incantations mixed in between were shattered like glass, turning into dark violet fragments that were blown away by the strong winds brought about by Joseph's high-speed attack.

Squinting slightly, Joseph caught sight of Wilde's furious face.

"Wilde, let's end this once and for all today!" Joseph faced Wilde straight on, whose original appearance could no longer be seen at all. The annihilative darkness of Eventuality wrapped around his current massive body were like evil spirits circling around him. His body gradually expanded, and countless tentacles pierced into the broken ground, like straws, drawing power from the endless abyss formed by souls of the dead.

Wilde's response was a roar that didn't sound human.

Joseph adjusted his position, and the flames around his body instantly broke through the battlefield isolated by this powerful domain.

The raging blizzard in the dark gloomy sky seemed to have been perforated by the sharp sword as the thick, dark clouds dissipated gradually.

The already destroyed Dream Creator meant that this battle was now situated in the real world. Time and reality were connected—

A red sun rose on this cold winter night, and a sharp sword-like gleam poured into Norzin. Snow in the air started to melt silently, just like how the death of everything was silently fading...

Gradually, the temperature started to rise, so much that even the air began to distort. The flames on Joseph's body burned brighter and brighter till the point where roiling heatwaves erupted from Wilde's body.

Joseph stood with his sword held up. His body no longer burned with the indomitable white flames but a red blaze instead.

Softly, he said, "Wilde, this place has been dark for too long... It's time for the sun to rise."

At this moment, the flames weren't burning without any fuel for nothing. Instead, they were burning in the name of protection!

Joseph gradually rose into the sky. Rays of light emerged from his body, as if breaking his human shell and embracing the realm of Supreme.

Many glowing balls of fire surrounded him as Joseph thoroughly became a living flame; a huge, continuously transforming figure that was so bright no one could look at it directly.

Joseph rose into the air and looked down upon Wilde on the ground.

"Wilde—

“This strike will sever all our past!”

Wilde looked up at his old foe. There wasn't any light in the dark night. Joseph was light itself!

“Joseph! The one dying is you!” Wilde cried out furiously as his human head went back into the massive body of the evil embodiment. His countless tentacles retracted into a ball at lightning speed as a large pale eye opened in the middle of that huge grayish tumor-like mass.

The brilliant Joseph was reflected in the center of its pale pupil the moment the eye was opened.

“Die! Wilde!”

Joseph's loud voice reverberated throughout the entire battlefield. In that instant, the ball of light by the name of Joseph hurtled toward Wilde like a meteorite, drawing a streak of light brighter than a newborn sun.

Wilde was not to be outdone either. A huge twisted array spun in that giant pupil, condensing annihilative darkness of Eventuality which was then shot out violently.

Black and gold collided, sending massive shock-waves rippling. Even the clouds in the sky were swept away as the two forces met.

Winston, like everyone else, watched the end of the battle from afar.

Shock-waves and the accompanying loud rumbles blew him down and he was forced to draw his own sword and stab it into the ground, holding onto the hilt tightly to prevent himself from being sent flying away in a sorry state.

“WILDE——!!!”

“JOSEPH——!!!”

The two furious roars seemed to resound throughout the entire world as each other's powerful force caused their bodies to distort

and deform!

The parts closest to the epicenter were disappearing at a speed visible to the naked eye. Wilde's massive embodiment started to sizzle and vaporize the moment it came into contact with Joseph, while Joseph started to age rapidly because of the annihilative darkness.

Eventually, massive aether waves rippling out from the death of Supreme-ranks collided and fused together, gradually forming into a ball of light. Like a nuclear explosion, it finally burst with a blinding light.

At the end of a long night, daybreak came.

Chapter 377: It's Really Not Scary At All

A16 Manor, side hall.

Greg was about to speak when a blinding light flashed outside the window, followed by loud noises and violent trembles.

Rumble— Boom— Crash—

For a moment, it seemed as if the ground was collapsing and all constructs in the manor tilted to the side.

A stunned Greg froze in place and he was pushed to the ground by inertia before he could even react. Those servants and guards following behind that had rushed in fell to the ground as well. Amidst the panic, the old butler recovered from his fall and got up, shouting in an attempt to maintain order in this chaotic scene.

“All of you calm down! Calm down! Master! Are you alright, Master?! What’s going on outside...”

The loyal butler wiped the blood off his face and rushed over to help his master.

A somewhat speechless Ji Bonong eyed the butler who was clearly much more flustered than him. Shaking his head, he patted the latter’s hand and said in a calm manner, “I’m fine. It’s probably an earthquake.”

He glanced at the gradually fading light as his spiritual senses throbbed.

While his thoughts were a little messy, seeing the Clock-wheel Worm’s second hand that had been rotated more than half a circle back, Ji Bonong roughly understood what had just happened.

Time was reset. All of space and time was like an hourglass that had

been reversed before starting to flow once again.

While it didn't appear like there wasn't any difference, the river of time that flowed was no longer in the same order as it originally was. In other words, the explosion, flashes, and shaking in front of them seamlessly connected to the scene from a few seconds ago was in fact on another timeline after the reset.

Ji Zhixiu had a confused look on her face. She felt a subtle dizziness as if she had just been on a roller coaster. She felt that everything before her eyes seemed somewhat different.

She gazed up at the swaying crystal lights as her whirling vision slowly returned to normal.

Memories from before the time reversal gradually returned to her mind as she watched the crystal chandelier sway. Young Miss Ji's eyes widened in surprise.

Time reversal?!

She hurriedly turned to meet Ji Bonong's gaze.

The father and daughter pair exchanged tacit glances, and both felt a chill run down their spines.

Time... Wasn't that the Law mastered by the Supreme-rank that was caught by Boss Lin and almost devoured?

While they weren't sure what exactly happened, they both vaguely sensed a connection between this series of events. The Supreme-rank existence's escape was probably planned by Boss Lin from the beginning. Only at this moment where it displayed its last bit of strength did it become an important chess piece in Boss Lin's hand.

Otherwise, Boss Lin would never have let that Supreme-rank existence go if he had really wanted to kill it.

And judging from the reaction of Joseph's disciple, Greg, this chess piece was probably influencing the decisive battle between Secret Rite Tower and the Corpse Devouring Sect happening thousands of miles away!

What sort of boldness and might was this? Using Supreme-ranks as chess pieces and the entirety of Norzin as a chessboard.

Ji Zhixiu felt a shortness of breath and her limbs were numb. She found it difficult to calm herself down.

After roughly ten seconds, the tremors came to a close and darkness returned to the outside.

Lin Jie had nearly wanted to find a spot to crawl under. Fortunately, the earthquake had stopped quickly enough, allowing him to save some face. As he clutched the table to support himself, his first reaction was to quickly check if the clock he held was intact.

“Phew...” Lin Jie heaved a sigh of relief as he saw the ticking clock and the cute little wriggling bug still in one piece.

Thank goodness it isn't broken! One of these would definitely cost a fortune...

“What was... Ah, it was an earthquake.”

Lin Jie moved away from the table rather naturally and casually patted the dust off himself with a calm expression, acting as if he wasn't someone that had nearly crawled under the table in panic.

Exhaling sharply, he said, “I still thought it was something big. Well, as the saying goes, you can't run away from a massive earthquake, but you don't have to run from a small one. You guys still haven't had enough life experiences, huh.”

“Haa...” He sighed and turned to Greg. Seeing him on the floor, he extended a hand and smiled. “Are you alright? Why were you that anxious? Youngsters are still too immature. Just come find me if you need to. No use being so flustered. It's not like I would run away.”

“I'm fine, I'm fine...” A subconscious chill ran down Greg's spine when he saw the smile, making him shake his head vigorously as he got up at once.

“That’s good,” muttered Lin Jie with some slight shaking of his head. “By the way, what did you want to say?”

Greg opened his mouth to speak, but the old butler immediately became alarmed when he noticed the youngster. He quickly ran in front of Ji Bonong and shouted in a panic, “That’s him! Stop him. Don’t let him come over. He threatened me with a knife and knocked me out. Master, he might not be the real Greg but an assassin!”

The servants that were strewn all around immediately came alive and quickly ran over to subdue Greg as chaos broke out once more.

Greg was at a loss and didn’t know what to do. While Lin Jie didn’t know what had exactly gone down, he could roughly guess this was a misunderstanding after all that time spent with the youngster.

Not knowing whether to laugh or cry, he tried to explain, “Mr. Butler, you might have misunderstood. He’s here for me. Besides, he’s just a kid, how could he have knocked you out?”

The old butler had been scared witless previously, but he was still certain of the person that had placed a knife against his neck. “No! I am very certain! It’s him! Mr. Lin, don’t be fooled by him!”

Lin Jie shrugged and looked toward the true master of the house for help.

Ji Bonong quickly came forward and said, “Enough. These two are our esteemed guests and it’s surely all just a misunderstanding. Albert, you must have been mistaken. For now, head to the banquet venue and appease our guests first.”

Naturally, Albert the butler couldn’t refute his master’s will. Thus, he could only give Greg a polite bow, but he still said stubbornly, “Yes, Master, but... a man doesn’t stand under a dangerous wall. With my loyalty, I beg you not to stay in the same room as a person wielding a knife.”

Surprise cries and shrieks from guests outside could indeed be heard. It appeared that the sudden earthquake had frightened many

people.

The banquet was forced to a temporary halt.

Ji Zhixiu walked over and whispered to Ji Bonong, "Father... Let's head out first. We would still have to deal with the guests outside."

Ji Bonong shot a passing glance at the clearly anxious Greg, then nodded. "My apologies for not being able to keep you company for longer, Mr. Lin."

Of course, Lin Jie expressed his understanding. "Please go ahead. It would be even better if you could come back later and tell me what happened."

What happened... Don't you know best?

Ji Bonong couldn't help but utter this inwardly, but he still kept the courteous smile. "I'll get someone to confirm the exact situation and will definitely update you once you are done talking with Greg."

As the Ji father and daughter pair left along with the butler, the rest of the servants followed suit. Only Greg and Lin Jie were left in the side hall.

Lin Jie exhaled sharply and sat down once more. Then, he subconsciously wiped away any dust on the small clock he held.

"Alright, tell me. What made you so panicked to the point you scared the old butler that much?"

Lin Jie felt that as an adult, he couldn't appear ignorant before a kid. Clearing his throat, he pretended to be calm and gave some advice, "Don't panic no matter what happens. All things can be turned around. While keeping cool might not necessarily work, it sure beats panicking. I've said before that you can always tell me if you encounter any difficulties or problems.

"As the saying goes, cross the bridge when we get there, right? I'll definitely help if I can." Lin Jie looked at Greg earnestly.

The young noble finally returned to his senses at this point, but he

was even more confused. He glanced out of the window, thinking about time that seemed to have changed, as well as his teacher who was still in an uncertain situation.

Finally he broke into an uneasy stammer, “Yes... But... I, you... Just now... I’m sorry... How...”

Lin Jie comforted the youngster, “Don’t be anxious. Speak slowly.”

Greg took a deep breath. Just as he opened his mouth to speak, vibrations from his palm interrupted him. It was then that he realized the communications device gripped tightly within his sweaty palm. Slightly startled, he glanced down to see the ID ‘Tower’ being shown on the display.

This was the ID specially used by Secret Rite Tower personnel for emergency notifications!

Could it be that his teacher’s battle had finally come to an end?!

“I’m sorry!” Greg jumped up and gave a polite bow to Lin Jie, and after seeing a response from the latter, he walked anxiously out of the side hall through a small door and quickly answered the call—

“Apprentice Knight Greg.” A voice he was unfamiliar with sounded on the other end.

It wasn’t Chief Winston.

Greg’s heart skipped a beat as he muttered, “That’s me.”

“Your mission is aborted.”

“What? Why?!”

The cold, indifferent voice over the call seemed as if it was to pronounce some sort of verdict.

A chill ran down Greg’s spine as he uttered in a trembling voice, “Teacher Joseph... How is Sir Radiant Knight?”

“At present, the entire battlefield is covered by a huge amount of

aether and our personnel are unable to enter or leave. Thus, I can't give you a precise answer."

Stunned, Greg glanced to a window at the side and lifted the curtain to peer into the distance. Seeing the gap in the sky made his heart sink. "What about the outcome of the battle?"

"From the final evaluation of the Aetheric Surveillance Network, it seems to be mutual destruction. We'll have to wait for reports from the Logistic Division on the ground investigation for more information."

Greg said nothing for a long moment, as if frozen in place.

Seems to be?

"Where's... where's Section Chief Winston?" After quite some time, Greg breathed in deeply to steady himself and regain his composure. "It was always him that contacted me before. How did..."

"He's currently located near the battlefield and has probably been affected. His current whereabouts are indeterminable." The tone of the voice on the other end never fluctuated at all. "Alright, apprentice knight. You've asked enough. We will inform you immediately if there is any news on Joseph since you are his disciple. But right now, in order to prevent a possible scheme of Wilde's, you are required to abort your mission and accept a new one—

"Kill Charlotte."

Greg hung up.

A strong sense of doubt had arisen in his heart.

Impossible... It's Impossible. Since Boss Lin actually interfered, it means that he responded to our request and saved Teacher.

It was impossible for him to have suffered mutual destruction.

But the biggest issue was that while Joseph's fate was now

unknown due to trying to stop Wilde, Secret Rite Tower was getting his disciple to continue with an even more dangerous mission before the situation became clear.

They were simply... exploiting Greg's hatred and thirst for revenge.

Just too frightening... Ji Zhixiu found herself trembling all over after receiving the latest information and reviewing all that had just happened.

Though she hadn't personally witnessed the battle between the Supreme-ranks, she had indeed seen Boss Lin move the hand on the face of the Clock-wheel Worm with her own eyes.

Judging from the look Greg had when he rushed in, which was almost to the point of tears, it probably meant that Joseph was at a severe disadvantage in that battle—at least before time was reversed.

But now, the present situation was still indeterminate.

Just like what they had witnessed before, when the Supreme-rank with the Law of Time did a reversal, it was merely a back-flow of time itself. Without any external interference, everything would just return back to its original position.

In other words, if Boss Lin wanted to affect the battle, simply reversing time would not have changed the outcome.

Therefore, the Supreme-rank transcendent existence had been intentionally released by Boss Lin so that at this specific moment, its death, which released massive power of Law, caused the cogs of fate to turn in what could be called the butterfly effect.

During this entire process, the most terrifying aspect was that Boss Lin had actually precisely calculated that existence's movements. Not only had he thoroughly extinguished that existence, he had used it to manipulate the fates of Wilde and Joseph.

From the beginning, from the moment he stepped out of his bookstore... No, from the moment Ji Zhixiu had selfishly decided to invite him to the banquet, or from even earlier, when Andrew gave

the Clock-wheel Worm, or was it since Wilde and Joseph knew each other?

In any case, everything was all a part of Boss Lin's plan!

Just the mere thought of it made a powerful being like Ji Zhixiu tremble in fear. And this was something ordinary folk would never ever have an inkling about.

"Miss Ji?"

A familiar greeting startled Ji Zhixiu. She turned at once and saw Lin Jie coming out of the side hall with the Clock-wheel Worm in hand.

"B-Boss Lin..." Ji Zhixiu panicked as if she had been caught red-handed. She immediately put down her hand covering her mouth and tried to force a smile. "Why have you come out? Anything I can help you with?"

Her gaze involuntarily fell on the Clock-wheel Worm and she shuddered.

"It's nothing much. I just remembered that you forgot to take the gift. Really, I've given it away already, how can it still be in my hands?"

Lin Jie took Ji Zhixiu's cold little hands and stuffed the Clock-wheel Worm into it. With a smile, he said, "After watching my demonstration just now, you shouldn't still be afraid, right? Look, it's really not scary at all, perhaps even rather obedient."

Chapter 378: Perfect Ending

Truth Union.

Andrew followed Raziel as they traveled beneath Machine Loop.

Abandoned laboratories all around them were quiet, and only complex seals above them lit up the path with weak light as the empty corridor echoed with the tapping of their leather shoes.

This was Norzin's city within a city—Machine Loop.

Machine Loop was located beneath Norzin's Central District, connecting to the Upper and Lower Districts. The lowest point of this city within a city was the gates to the Lower District which were tightly sealed with many layers of security. It was the most secret place in the entire Truth Union.

Other than those allowed to explore the Lower District as well as certain personnel from Rolle Resource Development, anyone else who wanted to pass here would have to face the full firepower of the Truth Union.

All the laboratories and factories of the Truth Union were in Machine Loop. This was the place where the inferior philosopher's stones were produced as well as where the 'Clay Idol' project was conducted, which gave rise to the creation of the eventually finished product S-277.

The restricted areas right at the bottom which had been long abandoned served as Raziel's stronghold for thousands of years. Everything that served the Path of the Flaming Sword as well as his own ideals, which included establishing mental control over the entire Truth Union, researching the brain structure of outstanding scholars, and allowing people to create true consciousness for homunculus... were all completed here.

In other words, this was a place to hide filth.

Andrew stared at the huge beehive-like laboratory in the center. Mechanical pathways linked every room together as if they were organs in a human body, while many expressionless laboratory technicians in white coats traversed to and fro between rooms.

They had never stopped working ever since Raziel made them.

But today, this numbness would end.

After all, the true Truth Union no longer needed to hide themselves.

An in-suppressible sense of excitement brewed in Andrew's heart, and he couldn't help but draw a deep breath as he followed behind Raziel.

He was slowly approaching the Truth Union's core and had never felt so close to power and authority.

Rumble...

Rumbling came from above, sounding like things collapsing as dust rained down from above.

Leading the way without breaking a stride, Raziel mused, "Interesting... Those two ascended to Supreme-rank at the same time."

Those two? Joseph and Wilde?

Andrew was stunned and a little surprised. *Boss Lin actually chose to let them ascend together... I imagined that it would be a situation where one party used the other as a stepping stone...*

"The situation you imagined has already happened once."

However, Andrew never expected Raziel to turn around and push up his glasses before lamenting, "Being able to gravely injure Haniel instantly and use her escape path and aftershock of her death to rewrite that battle's conclusion. I have to say, Lin... No, that bookstore owner is able to write scripts and plot-lines better than I thought."

Naturally, these were all scenes from the past that he viewed through those glasses of his.

As a member of the Path of Flaming Sword, Raziel knew how powerful Haniel's Law was. However, everything had a price, and this insect lacked rationality and acted recklessly because it was powerful.

It's only natural for her to fall into that person's hands. The greatest scholar known as 'Ethereal Wisdom' scratched the hole in his temple while he thought.

Haniel, one of the ten Path of the Flaming Sword's angels mentioned during our talk just now... died at the hands of Boss Lin just like that?

A Supreme-rank transcendent existence instantly crushed like an ant. This alone was enough to subvert Andrew's view of the world three times over. And moreover, hadn't time been reversed?

Anyone else would have broken out in cold sweat at that realization, but Andrew, who had already regarded himself as a dependent of the bookstore, could only be filled with awe, reverence, and excitement when he thought about how mighty Boss Lin was.

At this moment, Hood, who was in charge of monitoring the situation, called, "The Aether Surveillance Network has started to fail, but it looks like the battle is over. However, the fighting between Wilde and Joseph is still intense and it's not known if they're dead or alive. Secret Rite Tower is still urging us for aid. Should we send anyone?"

Andrew shrugged and revealed a snide sneer. "Let's wait a little. In any case, it seems that Secret Rite Tower doesn't really care about Joseph's life. This fella has always been wholeheartedly devoted to the organization... I really look forward to his reaction when he finds out the truth one day."

"Alright, let's wait for the battle's conclusion," Hood replied and hung up.

Raziel continued to walk on. “It seems like you don’t really care about the final outcome between those two.”

“Lord Raziel, you know that their victory or defeat has nothing to do with me nor the Truth Union’s cause.”

Naturally, Andrew couldn’t say that he was only loyal to Boss Lin; it would be best if the other useless people died. With a smile, he continued, “If Joseph wins, it’s just but Secret Rite Tower continuing on their original trajectory; if Wilde wins, he’s merely continuing the fight against Secret Rite Tower. Even if he overcomes Secret Rite Tower, it’s still the same for us: This world can do without Secret Rite Tower and the Corpse Devouring Sect, but it can’t do without the Truth Union. Regardless of whoever runs Norzin, scholars will always have a place here.”

Raziel nodded his head in a show of complete approval. “You’ve read it rather thoroughly... I’m really starting to admire you more.”

Toward this praise but that only knew how to agree, Andrew gave an insincere smile. “So, in order to give the Truth Union a stronger voice in the future, we ought to let the Truth Union return to the right path.

“That’s right. All those useless things trapped in the old ways ought to disappear.”

Raziel narrowed his eyes slightly as he gazed at those homunculi lab technicians below. He took a deep breath, then said, “The Truth Union doesn’t need them anymore indeed. Everything here has to make concessions for a better Truth Union of the future.”

Andrew immediately said, “Don’t worry, it’s all been arranged. I’ve already gotten someone to send Prima’s sister out.

“To the public, we’ll claim that the battle between Joseph and Wilde caused some experimental products on the inner laboratories to explode. The collapse would temporarily render the entrance to the Lower District unusable, and the supply of goods to Rolle Resource Development would come to a temporary halt.

“When the Ash Chamber of Commerce announces the second entrance and seizes the market share, attention of the Central District would shift. We would then have more time to extend the closing of the entrance.”

And continuing with a snide grin, “Honorable Chairman Maria, who voluntarily sacrificed herself to explore and experiment in the Lower District, would forever... remain underground as a heroic sacrifice.”

“A perfect ending.” That was Razel’s only reply.

He led Andrew around all the honeycomb-like laboratories—as the designer, familiarity with the place was practically engraved to his soul—and eventually brought Andrew aboard the elevator.

Razel lowered his head and stared at the staff below for a long time as the transparent glass elevators continued to climb upward.

Hidden away here was evidence of his previous work for the Path of the Flaming sword and evidence of some inhumane experiments. Undoubtedly, it had to be destroyed; otherwise, he would be disqualified from being the new figurehead that was about to rule over the whole Truth Union.

Though he no longer has a brain, does he still feel regret...? Andrew wondered as he observed the strange expression on Razel’s face. After all, Razel had worked with these homunculi for several thousands of years, and surely it wasn’t right if he didn’t feel anything for them.

The elevator continued to climb for some time, and they eventually reached the ground.

The sky was completely clear, but it was an endless white—all the ice and snow had melted.

Andrew stood on the roof of the Truth Union and gazed toward the entire battlefield. While he didn’t care what the outcome of this battle was, he was still curious about who Boss Lin would favor between Joseph and Wilde.

A giant ball of exploding light bloomed at the intersection of sky and earth. The ripples of that massive energy could even be felt here, and the hair and clothes of Andrew and Raziel fluttered in the hot winter wind.

Nearby streets had already been destroyed beyond recognition. The massive underground metal frame that supported Norzin was now showing, as if revealing an invisible monster in the deep dark caverns that was staring at the living.

“Lord Raziel, do it,” Andrew said.

Raziel detonated the self-destruct mechanism in the bodies of the homunculi workers in the underground laboratories beneath. A low rumble came from below, and the magnificent city within a city was once more shrouded in dust as the Truth Union raised the alarm.

Beep beep beep—

Andrew suddenly heard vibrations and a beeping coming from his chest pocket. With a frown, he took out his communications device and realized that the caller wasn’t from a recorded contact.

However, he still picked up the call because he was in a good mood.

“Who is this?”

“Chairman Andrew.” The voice on the other end sounded somewhat strained, as if the person was injured. “It’s me, Winston, chief of Secret Rite Tower’s Combat Division.”

Chapter 379: The Two Of Them Can't Come

With great difficulty, Winston managed to snap awake following the explosions brought about by the shock-waves.

He didn't know how long he had been unconscious for, nor did he know where he was on the battlefield. The only thing fortunate was that he found Caroline nearby when he opened his eyes.

It seemed that he still remembered to protect the weaker chief of the Logistics Division just before he lost consciousness during the chaos.

Caroline had regained consciousness earlier than he did and was standing at the side, 'gazing' at the battlefield with her eyes closed and brows furrowed.

Cough cough... Ack.

Winston spat out a mouthful of blood. He patted the dust off his head and stood up.

As the aether within his body had been exhausted in order to resist the shock-wave, Winston had no way to treat himself. He could only retrieve an already blood-stained bandage in the function slot of his armor and forcefully applied it on his upper arm to stop the bleeding.

Having bandaged himself, he ignored the pain throughout his body and staggered over to Caroline.

He glanced in the direction that Caroline was facing. Dust and smoke abounded, making it difficult to see anything, yet it was so quiet that only the whistle of the wind could be heard.

Apparently, Caroline had sensed his approach and said, "I'm trying to seek information pertaining to Joseph..."

Winston was stunned for a moment before he immediately blurted out with urgency, “How is it? Did you find any?”

The creases on Caroline’s forehead deepened as she shook her head. “No...”

Halfway through her sentence, she groaned in pain as blood flowed from her eyes once more.

Fortunately, Winston was supporting her. Otherwise, she would surely have fallen to the ground.

Winston’s anxious mood took a turn. He had realized what sort of danger this kind of action represented in an environment filled with aether produced by the clash of Supreme-ranks.

“...Don’t push yourself too hard.” Winston sighed.

“Currently, I’m the only one with the ability to look into things. If I don’t push myself, who else can we rely on?” Caroline, whose eyes were bleeding, reached for her waist pouch out of habit. She wanted to grab a cigarette, but only managed to take out some tiny fragments of tobacco paper.

Together, the two found a relatively flat and spacious place to sit down and view the distant ‘scenery’ that was faintly discernible in the smoke and dust.

The battle of Supreme-ranks had finally reached a conclusion—

In the end, those two turned into balls of light respectively; one black and one white that erupted with darkness and light capable of devouring everything. The two immense powers clashed without any hesitation in the belief that they would definitely kill each other.

The center of the battlefield had now become a crater. Surrounding buildings had been reduced to black dust, and the entire area was now like a desolate desert reeking of death.

Due to the explosion of these two, no, three Supreme-ranks, violent aether was scattered throughout the entire battlefield, as if it were a

contaminant.

Most normal transcendent beings would experience tinnitus and vomiting just by being in the vicinity. Ordinary folk in this position would probably suffer physical aberrations on the spot.

Beyond that, there was still a lot of residual power that would cause trouble. The Laws without any master dissipated throughout affected everything. People would inexplicably burn here, age and disappear, or even step into a dream realm...

Winston's conjecture was that the area within a large radius around 67th Avenue would become a new restricted area on file.

"Damn it..." Winston scratched his head in distress and cursed. "Under such circumstances, the majority in Secret Rite Tower will assume that Joseph is dead. The Tower won't send anyone in to die and would first seal this place in order to minimize casualties."

"Though I can't find him, I still sense that Joseph is probably alive..." Caroline muttered as she stubbornly continued to scan the battlefield with Eyes of Gazing.

"I'm sure he's still alive!" Winston insisted through gritted teeth. His past camaraderie and friendship with Joseph flashed in his mind.

....What a useless piece of trash I am. Was I able to even help Joseph with anything?!

It felt as if a knife was being twisted in his heart as regret and pain engulfed him. Winston really wished he could have died here alongside Joseph.

Winston hadn't even been able to regret after seeing Melissa disappear before his eyes. Now, he was equally as helpless with Joseph's disappearance. This uselessness made him feel like it was practically no different from betrayal.

"We can't give up yet," Winston whispered all of a sudden. "There's someone that can save Joseph."

"Boss Lin?" Caroline froze. "But..."

“No. Or rather, that’s true in a sense. Boss Lin has already saved Joseph once. Now, we can only rely on ourselves to pull Joseph back from the abyss.” Winston inhaled sharply, then said, “It’s Andrew.”

Caroline fell silent for a bit when she learned of Winston’s choice.

“He too is one of the bookstore owner’s lackeys. Since Boss Lin interfered, it means that Joseph is definitely still alive. Right now, only the Truth Union has the ability to freely enter and exit this battlefield. This is our only hope,” said Winston as he observed the chaotic power of Law scattered throughout the battlefield.

His own communications device had been destroyed, so he could only find one that was still usable to call Andrew.

Lin Jie placed the clock in Ji Zhixiu’s hand and encouraged, “It’s actually rather cute, try touching it.”

Ji Zhixiu trembled slightly as she took the small, exquisitely crafted clock, then forced a smile. “Indeed, i-it isn’t scary at all. I won’t be afraid.”

While that was what she said, she didn’t dare touch that worm at all.

Lacking the strength to awaken its ability was one thing. But if Ji Zhixiu was careless and accidentally made time flow forward or back, causing important events to change... she would become a great sinner.

She took a deep breath as she glanced at her hand that was still trying to resist. “I apologize for letting you see this embarrassing side of me...”

“Haha.” Lin Jie waved her off and remarked with a smile, “Everyone has things that they are afraid of. Why apologize for such a thing?”

“The key is that people need to overcome their own fears. What you fear is often fear itself. The more you are afraid, the more you have to face it head-on. Only then would you have the chance to grow.

Don't be afraid to try, for it will only do you well."

"Yes." Ji Zhixiu nodded at once.

Lin Jie had come out of the side hall mainly to wait for Greg as well as to pass the gift. At this moment, he was on the second floor and casually looked down.

Even after experiencing an earthquake with a magnitude of 7 or 8, A16 Manor still maintained its grand, indomitable aura. To the Ji household, the earthquake had merely been a matter of a few plates and chandeliers breaking, and there wasn't much anxious panic at all.

Lin Jie couldn't help but muse that even such a tremor wouldn't faze the rich, unlike his shabby bookstore that was always either leaking or drafty.

Lin Jie's heart really ached...

Ji Zhixiu waited silently by the side, observing the bookstore owner as he fell silent. A solemn look had appeared on his face as the panicking people below reflected in his eyes like ants whose nests were on fire. All living beings were merely parts of a small stage in his eyes, and he was the only audience.

Ji Zhixiu glanced down at the Clock-wheel Worm in her hand. Exerting strength in her fingers, she clenched it tightly... If this was a stage play directed by Boss Lin—

She, too, wanted to be the main character.

Young Miss Ji took a deep breath. She absolutely couldn't be afraid. Otherwise, she wouldn't even be able to be a chess piece.

Just like Joseph and Wilde...

"I wonder how Mr. Wilde and Mr. Joseph are doing now? Speaking of which..." Ji Zhixiu said, somewhat sadly, "Those two can be considered 'book pals' of mine too. I had wanted to invite them to the banquet, but unfortunately..."

Not too bad, young lady... But these two would fight the moment they meet, right?

Lin Jie was, in fact, rather pleased to hear that. After all, his purpose in setting up the book cafe was to let his customers interact, spur each other on to study, and buy more books.

However, Joseph was on a mission now, and Old Wil was probably doing research. Given the latter's lonesome temperament, how could he attend a banquet of this sort?

"The two of them can't come," explained Lin Jie with a shrug.

Ji Zhixiu's heart skipped a beat. "Did something happen to those two?"

"No. How could something happen to the two of them..." Lin Jie pondered for a bit, then cracked a joke. "I just don't think your idea is reliable. The two of them would definitely fight if they met. And in the end, they would surely part on bad terms."

Part on bad terms?

Part on bad terms!

Ji Zhixiu's eyes widened. *How could they part on bad terms? Of course, they had to be around before they could part!*

Could it be Boss Lin is implying that... those two are still alive?!

Chapter 380: Dead, But Not Dead

“Winston? Why is he calling?” Andrew frowned and turned to Raziel.

While this fellow no longer had a brain, the latter was still a Supreme-rank powerhouse with immense mental ability after all. Perhaps enough to comprehend information that wasn’t surface level.

Raziel adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses. “Let’s hear what he has to say.”

Andrew picked up the communications device and asked knowingly, “Oh~ It’s Division Chief Winston. You don’t sound too good, and why are you using someone else’s communications device? Did something happen?”

While speaking, he glanced at the massive crater in the distance that was enveloped in a massive cloud of dust.

Although Secret Rite Tower had quickly set up a temporary third layer barrier to block out the vision and thoughts of ordinary folk, someone of Andrew’s ability and level could still see it clearly.

From his point of view, the entire 67th Avenue was in ruins, devoid of any signs of life.

It was plain that Winston had been seriously hurt at the front-lines...

Winston’s voice was still ragged and wavering. “Enough of this useless chatter... The Truth Union hasn’t sent any reinforcements to the battlefield at all. Are you all trying to cut off all ties with Secret Rite Tower?”

Andrew could hear the hidden anxiety in Winston’s voice and

smiled calmly. “Has the battle between Joseph and Wilde been over? Personnel dispatched by us are just to clean up the battlefield. Does it matter if they are early or late? As for cutting ties... This isn’t something for you to decide, Winston. If it really does happen, who do you think would end up worse off?”

After falling silent for a moment, Winston said, “Joseph will win... Boss Lin said so himself.”

Andrew was surprised before he heard Winston continue. “You heard correctly. I can tell you that Secret Rite Tower sent personnel to find out about Boss Lin’s thoughts regarding this battle, and I was the person in charge for this mission.”

Andrew instinctively turned toward Raziel, who lifted up his glasses and nodded. “He’s not lying.”

“Ha-ha-ha...” Andrew broke into laughter. “So, this is how Secret Rite Tower treats a loyal knight. How laughable. How do you reckon Joseph would think if he knew he was being used as a disposable tool?”

Winston replied coldly, “I don’t know what he would think, but he must win. If he dies due to the Truth Union’s inaction, do you think you can escape responsibility?”

“Whoa,” Andrew scoffed. “He’s a part of Secret Rite Tower. What does it have to do with me if you people don’t save him?”

Winston snorted. “Originally, nothing. But I guess I’ve gotten you involved now... How do you think Boss Lin would think if he knows that you were aware of this but refused to send anyone to find Joseph?”

“...”

Even if he really disliked Joseph, a fellow who wasn’t purely devoted to Boss Lin, perhaps it was precisely this that Boss Lin was rather passionate about changing him.

In other words, if the bookstore owner could turn Joseph from being a noble, righteous, selfless knight and finally bow down to

become a devout believer, it would indeed be worthy of killing time.

This was probably something that would bring joy to him. And for an existence like Boss Lin, finding joy was probably the most important thing in his life.

Perhaps this was Boss Lin's sadistic hobby?

Alright... Though he really disliked Joseph, as a follower and believer of the Lord, anything that could make the Lord happy was Andrew's first priority.

He let out a sigh and said slowly, "Fine. I'll send someone to search the battlefield. But it would only be limited to just a search."

On the other end, Winston seemed to heave a sigh of relief. After what seemed like a long pause, he gave an awkward thanks and hung up the communications device.

Andrew glanced at the communications device in his hand and imagined the image of the burly armored knight, Winston. Goosebumps formed all over his body and he switched off the communications device in disgust.

"Secret Rite Tower is quite bold to even willingly give up a Supreme-rank seed. But based on my current sense, even if Joseph is truly alive, I'm afraid things would develop as they think," commented Raziel.

Andrew nodded and activated his communications device again.

He didn't care if Joseph could really survive, but that old knight's life was, to a certain extent, related to Boss Lin's inclinations. Andrew couldn't be as perfunctory as before and had to send forth someone reliable.

He scrolled through his address book—

Prima Sandra.

This young lady was the new Head of Medicine that Andrew had

personally promoted. She had replaced her older sister, who had just been recently sent out from here and was temporarily in a vegetative state. At the same time, she had been blessed by the bookstore owner as well.

In terms of ability, or status, this was entirely foolproof.

He immediately dialed the number.

Prima was in the laboratory, busy making adjustments to her elixirs.

She was deeply engrossed and was biting the tip of her pen as she tried her best to calculate the ratio formula and the possible consequences of adopting the special characteristics of the ingredients. Her expression was one of extreme focus.

The laboratory, located near the surface, had the highest level of clearance. No one except Prima herself, Andrew, and Hood were allowed to enter and disturb her.

Fluctuations from the battlefield many miles away didn't catch her attention, nor did the several underground and ear-piercing alarms that were closer. It was only when the loud and shrill ringtone sounded from the communications device did she manage to peel herself away from her elixirs.

—Having witnessed what Prima was like in her laboratory for the first time, Andrew had forced the young lady to set this ringtone on her communications device to allow her to break free from her experiments when she was deeply engrossed.

“Ah!” Prima looked up with a start, dropping the pen in her hand from fright as she fumbled to connect the call.

She was rather anxious upon realizing it was a call from her superior and she stammered hurriedly, “Vi-Vice-Chairman!”

It's Chairman! Andrew grumpily corrected in his heart. *Never-mind... Now isn't the time to harp on it.*

Andrew quickly said, “Pick a few doctors and apothecaries from

amongst your subordinates. I will also assign some combatants to you. Lead them to the battleground on 67th Avenue and search for survivors. Take note that the Law of ‘Eventuality’ scattered from the death of a Supreme-rank covers that place. Equip protective gear and take safeguard measures.”

While it was said to be a search for survivors, in truth, no ordinary transcendent being could have survived being in the middle of the battlefield.

But for the sake of Secret Rite Tower’s face, he absolutely couldn’t say that it was just to find Joseph.

Alright! Prima thought to herself as she nodded vigorously.

T-This is probably my first assignment since taking up the post, right?

Then, as she recalled that Andrew had asked everyone to pay attention to A16 Manor, a strange hunch stirred within her. “Is this mission related to Boss Lin?” she asked cautiously.

Andrew’s reply was succinct. “Yes. So you have to do your best, understand?”

Prima’s heart skipped a beat, and she turned to look at the book that Boss Lin had given her— ***Primordial Tome of Potions*** .

Boss Lin had once said that the study of medicine was to create one’s own value!

She took a few deep breaths to adjust her mental state... *This isn’t just my first mission as Head of Medicine but one related to my savior, the great existence, Mr. Lin. That means to say, it’s time to prove my worth to Boss Lin!*

“I’ll give my all!” said Prima as she pumped herself up.

On the other end, a question had popped up in Andrew’s mind after he ended the call.

Come to think of it, though the Lord personally judged it to be Joseph’s victory, is Wilde, that conniving black magician that terrifies so many,

really dead?

Raziel suddenly answered, “Dead.”

Andrew turned around, only to hear Raziel add on, “But not dead.”

“...”

Andrew had a complex look on his face at this moment. Gazing through the hole in Raziel’s head, he really wondered what exactly was going through the latter’s mind.

Raziel, however, wasn’t bothered by Andrew’s menacing gaze. He just looked toward the horizon and muttered, “Augustus...”

“The Giant King that even the Path of Flaming Sword couldn’t make bow down. Yet now you are finally forced to answer the calling of fate and step into the vortex of strife. It’s probably only a matter of time before you walk down from the throne, right?”

Andrew couldn’t understand these murmurings, but at this moment, when he looked into Raziel’s eyes, he didn’t seem like a praise bot whose head had been hollowed out but the true ‘Ethereal Wisdom’ that had created the entirety of Norzin.

When death approached...

Wilde fell on his back. A sensation of being burned alive by a raging inferno engulfed his body. Such pain almost exceeded his limits until he began to forget this pain.

While resisting Joseph’s final attack, his physical body had disintegrated bit by bit, and at this point, it was nearly completely gone.

The black magician had tried to sacrifice himself to Boss Lin once more at this moment, trying to use this move to escape one more time. However, he suddenly recalled the last time he had done this.

Boss Lin’s response to him sacrificing his own life was... rejection!

That’s right. Only by refusing would the sacrificed life be separated

from samsara and resurrected in the human world.

At the same time, this meant that Boss Lin had rejected Wilde's act of sacrificing himself, which was, in a sense, refusing Wilde to be a subject of his divine kingdom. It meant that there was a problem with Wilde's loyalty!

"My...my loyalty...How is that possible..."

Wilde's eyes widened, and he suddenly lost his voice.

Indeed, there was an aspect where he hadn't been sufficiently loyal and could in fact be considered an extremely blasphemous act.

And that was, he had sacrificed himself because he wanted Boss Lin to reject him and use this to defeat Joseph.

In this world, how could there be a devout believer that is unwilling to enter the realm of their god and even actively wish to be rejected by their Lord? More so to use this in a bid to fulfill a personal wish?

Oh god, what have I done?!

Wilde belatedly realized why Boss Lin had been on Joseph's side in this battle.

No! Could it be... I wanted... I still wished... No... Could this be Boss Lin's treatment of me...

Wilde struggled internally. Pain and extreme regret washed over him as he reached out, hoping to hold onto something.

But he no longer had any hands.

In more scientific terms, he was vaporizing. The process ought to be an extremely painful one, but as even his senses disappeared, the pain was irrelevant.

In the final frame of his fading vision, he saw Joseph fall to the ground as well.

The old knight's body was also in tatters, his eyes filled with

unwillingness and anger, yet bright like the gleam of a sword in sunlight. Unfortunately, Wilde's vision quickly dimmed, and he only saw half of his opponent's body turn into ashes.

Oh well... Is this... my eventuality?

Wilde was powerless to change anything. Though extremely unwilling, he gradually let go and sank into the suffocating darkness of death. His vision was pitch-black, and all that surrounded him was silence...

Suddenly—

“Wilde.”

A familiar voice pierced through the nothingness of death and entered his ears as if were an illusion.

“My disciple.”

The voice was clearer now. This voice, as if passing through layers of dreams, crossing over mountains and seas, directly entered Wilde's ears.

It was intimate and all so familiar.

Wilde's eyes jerked wide open. Darkness surrounded him. It was pitch-black in all directions, making it impossible for him to get his bearings.

Wilde couldn't feel his limbs nor any sensation in his hands and feet. It even made him wonder if he truly existed.

Only a circle of ancient characters that seemed to be casually written floated around him, blocking the surrounding darkness.

“T-Teacher...?”

Wilde, or what little thought that was left, could barely recognize who was calling him...

‘Ancient King of Sacred Sound,’ ‘Black Emperor,’ ‘Dragon Linguist,’

‘Last Descendant of Giants’... All sorts of titles given to this great transcendent being. He was a living history book as well as the black magician Wilde’s teacher—Augustus.

“Teacher...” Wilde was suddenly at a loss when he spotted a green dot of light glowing in the distance that was gradually increasing in brightness. Without even thinking, Wilde ran in that direction. After what seemed like an eternity, he arrived and grabbed the latter in this endless dream.

Flap, flap, flap—

The small pair of wings on this letter immediately retracted, as if it were a docile messenger pigeon.

This method of sending messages... It’s indeed Teacher!

As soon as Wilde had this thought, the wings disappeared and the letter lay quietly in his hand—Wilde couldn’t be sure if it was his hand.

On top of the letter was a golden jewel in the shape of a scarab.

This is... the ring that Teacher wore?

Before Wilde was able to react, he was sucked into the eyes of the golden beetle as Augustus’ voice still echoed in his ears...

“Godspeed, my final disciple.”

Chapter 381: Same Origin

Prima put down the communications device and let out a long sigh of relief. Then, she patted her face all over to clear her mind that had been immersed in reading and making elixirs for a long time.

She glanced at the vials beside her, then picked up ***Primordial Tome of Potions*** from its place on the spotless experiment table. Her fingers ran over the book's cover as she gazed in fascination at the seemingly shining golden words.

To Prima, this was the light of truth.

This book recorded almost all knowledge of potions that far surpassed current research. It was the lifelong pursuit of all apothecaries.

She hugged the thick book tightly, and her heart couldn't help but pound wildly with excitement.

Boss Lin's intent... was Lady Walpurgis' intent.

During the time spent in the bookstore, Prima had come to thoroughly understand one thing: As the next person wielding the authority to rule over the night, Mu'en was also sincerely and diligently managing as the bookstore's assistant, because the owner, Lin Jie, was the 'father' that had given her a new life.

Lin Jie was first and foremost in everything that Mu'en thought or did.

Therefore, Prima, who had lived with Mu'en during that period and listened to Mu'en's reverence toward Boss Lin every single day, naturally had this bit engraved down to her core.

This must be a test! Boss Lin hopes that I can solve problems with my own strength and offer my value to him!

Prima's life had begun to change drastically ever since she left the

bookstore. This great existence, said to be omniscient and omnipotent, had completely changed her fate as a casual charity.

Since this was so, she ought to do her best to repay him.

Ever since obtaining knowledge from Boss Lin, Prima had never stopped learning. She had been awaiting this day to come!

Prima took a few deep breaths. She couldn't help but feel a tad nervous at the thought of having to lead and direct others for the first time after being promoted to Head of Medicine.

After mentally rehearsing how she ought to act, the shy girl mustered her courage, tidied her clothes, and stepped out of the laboratory, then observed the scholars that were all looking toward her.

She endured the subconscious urge to shrink back and hide behind the door. Imitating her sister's lively and capable bearing from her memories, she announced calmly, "This is an emergency mission. Those A-rank and above who aren't on any researching missions are to follow me. Bring along protective equipment. We are heading to 67th Avenue."

This could be considered the first time Prima had ever given an order. Watching the silent bunch before her, she even wished the ground could open and swallow her up.

Sure enough, I'm still—

"Yes, Head."

The scholars naturally divided into two groups. Those below A-rank continued to work, while those above A-rank got up and headed toward the room where protective gear was stored.

Ordinary scholars that hadn't yet come into contact with levels of authority merely had pure, simple thoughts. As long as there were orders from above, they would comply.

With protective suits, at least there was a guarantee on their lives, and infection or pollution was a small matter.

Moreover, 67th Avenue was a rare site left behind by two Supreme-ranks that had fought with all their might... Surely, there was a lot there worth studying!

As long as some results could be achieved, they could leave a mark in the field of academia. Even if they died, this would be all worth it!

Some scholars even walked over excitedly and shook Prima's hand. "Thank you for this opportunity, Boss! I'll definitely carry out any instructions you have well!"

Prima observed the scholar in front of her and nodded vigorously as the apprehension in her heart turned into joy.

So... this is how Sis felt like.

67th Avenue.

The smoke that filled the air was mixed with the powerful aether and chaotic Law. Like a mist, when sucked into the lungs, it was like a slow-acting poison that continuously killed unlimited lives.

Winston fidgeted anxiously as he eyed the communications device in his hand, then turned to glance at Caroline, who was resting. Her few instances of probing had pushed her to her limits. Currently, she had completely lost consciousness and couldn't condense any aether.

But... It had still been all for naught.

Caroline's Eyes of Gazing could only sense Joseph's power of Burning still pulsing rhythmically, just like a departed soul still lingering on this desolate battlefield, interfering with all the information she could garner.

This made Caroline feel utterly helpless.

Similarly, all these lingering residual power prevented Winston from stepping into this area.

Now, their only hope was the personnel that the Truth Union would

send.

A hand suddenly patted Winston on his shoulder.

Winston was startled and had the subconscious urge to draw his sword. But then he realized that there wasn't anyone else here but Caroline and himself, and thus the arrival could only be the rescue team they were awaiting. With that, he felt a sense of joy and relief.

He turned his head, then... saw nothing.

"Please lower your head."

Hearing this, Winston immediately lowered his gaze and saw a completely covered shorty looking at him.

"You are..."

"Prima Sandra, the Truth Union's Head of Medicine." Prima's muffled voice came through the aether protection suit. "Vice-Chairman Andrew sent me here."

"So it's you." Winston was slightly caught by surprise. According to Secret Rite Tower intelligence, Prima was also one of the few that had an extended stay at the bookstore for some time. After that period of time, she was directly promoted by Andrew to Head of Medicine.

Indeed, as long as it concerns Boss Lin, Andrew doesn't dare be negligent and sends someone so directly connected to the bookstore.

But, does this mean that what Boss Lin said back then was true? "Joseph will win, just that the process might be a little complicated"... or so.

After all, if that being really wanted to toy with them, he could easily have stopped Prima from coming.

Winston felt as if half the weight had been lifted from his shoulders. In that case, Joseph's chances of survival were at least twenty percent higher than before.

Great... But can this young lady before me really do it?

Winston couldn't hide his worry. Although Prima was indeed favored by the bookstore, she was still really young... Moreover, even the intelligence reports of Secret Rite Tower had no records of the girl's achievements in the field of medicine.

Even if Joseph was still alive, the situation was probably dire. Could she really do it?

Just relying on those doctors and apothecaries that made up the numbers wasn't enough.

Even though she could see the doubt in the knight's eyes, Prima no longer doubted herself anymore. Calmly, she replied in a firm manner, "Although Vice-Chairman Andrew didn't say, I believe you want me to save Mr. Joseph, right? Please have faith in me. I will definitely bring him out! I swear in the name of the night!"

Winston was taken aback. He never imagined that she would actually be a believer of a Primordial Witch.

But... that's not right! Since she believes in Walpurgis, then her stance toward the bookstore owner should be one toward pagans... or a pagan god! After all, it's that existence who's the originator of the Corpse Devouring Sect.

Why would Prima accept the bookstore's bestowment and even stand directly on Andrew's side? Could she have betrayed her faith... No, that can't be right either. Her gaze was sincere... almost fanatic...

Winston stared in puzzlement at the back of the girl that had turned around. The confusion he had couldn't be answered, but a frightening guess had vaguely taken shape.

In such a situation, there might only be one possibility—the bookstore owner and the Primordial Witch... are of the same origin?

At the moment Winston was utterly shocked by his own conjecture, Prima had already led her subordinates into the hellish battlefield without any hesitation.

The pervading aether force field tore at Prima's protective suit like a wild beast. Prima tightened her hold of **Primordial Tome of**

Potions in her arms and took a deep breath. After assigning tasks to the others, she gradually went deeper into the heart of that ruined battlefield.

Chapter 382: Dawn's Revival

Dark and oppressive clouds blocked out the sun in this area where the ground was utterly ravaged. A never-ending storm seemed to rage, making it seem as if Prima had stepped into a strange other world.

The dark and turbid smoke was isolated by the protective suit, but Prima could still clearly see the countless flames burning in front of her as well as annihilative substances floating like gossamer.

Wherever these intertwined aether passed, it only resulted in either scorched earth or directly transformed into nothingness.

Even if one couldn't comprehend the environment outside the protective suit, just witnessing this was all it took to make one feel uncomfortable.

...Of course, even if such a rare phenomenon was indeed worth researching, Prima didn't wish to ever experience it firsthand.

Prima silently muttered encouragement as she struggled through the many ruins, carefully searching every possible corner

Before entering this area, she had already assigned the tasks to each subordinate in detail. Each person was in charge of a small area. This would be more efficient.

In truth, everyone already knew...

It was near impossible for anyone to survive a Supreme-rank clash that was just like a meteorite strike, except for the two involved.

Therefore, the only reason to head into the center of the battlefield was to search for either Joseph or Wilde.

However, Prima didn't think so. While her mission objective was to find Joseph, she didn't focus solely on him and instead searched the battlefield for anyone who might have survived.

The covenant from ancient times that stretched on today would protect everyone who slept peacefully in the night.

This was something that believers of Walpurgis ought to do.

“Is anyone still alive—” Prima clasped her hands around her mouth and called out. As she couldn’t use aether, she could only shout as loudly as she could.

As she gradually approached the center point, the number of severely rotted corpses got less. All that met her eyes was complete desolation.

At the same time, because Prima was in a laboratory all year round, her stamina was starting to run out.

Panting, Prima raised a hand in front of her and noticed that the protective suit was gradually getting worn with age. Thus, she used an internal device to inject herself with an elixir that temporarily strengthened her physique.

These were elixirs she had been researching and developing based on the secret manual which she hadn’t officially reported to the Truth Union. Thus, they weren’t named yet, nor could she mass-produce or provide them to others. At present, she could only use these on herself.

The environment is getting drastically worse. I can’t last long even with protective gear. I’ve got to hurry , thought Prima to herself.

The influence of Joseph’s domain of ‘Burning’ had greatly weakened because the concept of this domain had been pushed to the extremes, where at the very end, even the owner’s own body would burn. By Prima’s estimation of the speed in which aether in this area decayed, it would probably completely disappear after three days.

However, Wilde’s domain of ‘Eventuality’ remained in action, trying to grind down everything within its reaches. The closer one got toward the center, the more dangerous it was.

A day later.

Prima wiped the sweat from her forehead and continued trudging forward in a lackluster fashion.

She had more or less found the right path. Moreover, after using an elixir array to communicate with the Night Dream Realm to obtain guidance, she had vaguely detected a weak aura. One that was fleeting and difficult to pinpoint.

Thus, Prima had retreated midway once to replenish her supplies as well as take some of her spare elixirs... which were considered taboo to most.

At present, in a geographical sense, she was already at the center of the battlefield. Her perception and senses were tingling as if warning her, and that weak aura was much stronger here.

Almost there... Prima thought to herself. Then, it suddenly felt as if she had broken through some invisible obstacle when she took another step forward. Her foot landed on what seemed like a different ground and the pressure she felt lightened. With a deep breath, she steadied herself.

The intertwined chaotic aether that raged like a storm all around faded in an instant.

The silent battlefield was devoid of life, and there wasn't so much as a squeal. Meanwhile, Prima found herself alone in a dark domain, feeling unsafe as she shrank back slightly.

Then... Her eyes narrowed as they focused on a massive crater before her.

In the middle of the crater that had been eroded more than a hundred meters deep was a silhouette that was so tiny in comparison.

The figure held a sword thrusting forward and maintained that posture, un-moving. Human features couldn't even be seen from this figure as most of the body was completely charred and had shriveled into withered branches. Currently, the figure was still gradually turning into ash which floated off in the air, just like a

thin outline that had been sketched out in a rush.

However, only the white flame burning in its remaining eye socket still shone brightly, becoming the only source of light in this dark world, like a beacon guiding future generations.

It was as if this statue pointing its sword at the dead enemy was frozen for all eternity at this moment.

This area that wasn't harmed by the destructive surroundings spread out from that body. Even in death, it wasn't eradicated.

What kind of willpower is this...

Prima was at a loss for words due to the shock. After a while, she roused from it and climbed down the crater hurriedly and rushed toward the 'corpse,' almost falling and crashing to the ground in the process.

Having finally reached Joseph's 'corpse' with some difficulty, Prima now had a tricky issue. She didn't know where to place her hands, so she carefully circled the 'corpse' several times.

Evidently, Joseph was as good as dead. All that remained was his almost obsessive will.

Is he... trying to protect something? Prima felt admiration for this Great Radiant Knight whom she had never met before.

Tens of thousands of years ago, Walpurgis had made the covenant to provide weak, feeble humans with protection. And now, it was people like these that exhausted their all to protect Norzin.

Lady Walpurgis would definitely be happy if she could see all this.

Prima was determined to save the life of this hero in front of her.

As she took out an elixir she had refined and poured it on the severely destroyed body, Prima whispered softly, "Can... you hear me?"

Then, she waited for a bit.

Prima had named this elixir ‘Dawn’s Revival.’ Its main ingredient was the placenta of a baby, an organ that witnessed how life was produced from nothing and contained the concept of ‘birth.’ Thus, the elixir refined from it contained a glimmer of the concept of ‘life.’

Prima had never evaluated her own level of apothecary, but if others knew she had managed to refine an elixir with these concepts, they would most definitely be horrified—

Because this was a power that only Supreme-ranks had. It could even be said to surpass Supreme-rank because Supreme-ranks usually only grasp the authority over one type of Law, yet Prima didn’t have such restrictions when it came to concocting elixirs.

Therefore... in theory, she could refine an elixir that contained all concepts, and perhaps even further advance it to become a Law.

As if it were the light of dawn itself, the elixir flowed down Joseph’s broken body. Wherever it passed, carbonized bits peeled off and new flesh grew. Along with that came bones and blood vessels sprouting forth like a growing sapling which filled up the entire frame.

Arms, limbs, torso, head, eyes, hair...

The potion that dripped onto the ground dissipated into a burst of light, seemingly coming into contact with seeds within the scorched ground that were already dead. In an instant, lush green grass full of vitality sprouted and grew, producing a scene completely incongruous with this silent battleground.

The white flames in the empty eye socket seemed to dance energetically.

Prima’s eyes lit up as she observed the small aether monitor in her hand. She could see that the originally weak reaction was gradually strengthening. And besides that, she could already hear a weak heartbeat.

“Knight Joseph, if you can hear me, please try to condense aether.

This will facilitate the union of your body and will.”

Prima slowly repeated it three times, making sure that the other party did as told. Then, she squatted down and pulled a few strands of newly grown grass out.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry...” she whispered as she stored away the innocent strands of grass into her equipment bag that she used to store her elixirs.

Before Andrew completely took control of the Truth Union, Prima couldn’t reveal her frightening elixir concocting ability for the time being. Therefore, she could only sacrifice these strands of grass to act as evidence.

“I—” A hoarse raspy voice of an old man sounded.

Hearing this voice, Prima looked up and blinked several times. She saw that Joseph had basically recovered, except for the white flame remaining in his eye socket. The old knight opened his other normal eye and looked at her. His lips parted as if he wanted to say something, then he fell to the ground with a ‘thud’ and lost consciousness.

“...” Prima hurriedly took out her communications device from her pocket. What she had done could only be considered emergency aid. She would have to continue concocting elixirs if she wanted to fully treat him.

Since Joseph had been found, she ought to first inform Winston. He had seemed extremely anxious when they had first met.

Chapter 383: Safe Place

“Chief Winston, I’ve found Jo—”

Before Prima could even finish, a trembling voice from the other end cut her off, “Really? You f-found him? You found him... H-how is he? Joseph...”

He couldn’t bring himself to go on at this point.

Joseph’s battle had affected the hearts of way too many. Emotions of despair and hope had fluctuated so intensely that Winston, who had always prided himself on his calmness, couldn’t control himself. He was afraid to hear news about Joseph’s death.

Prima decided that it was better not to let the patient’s ‘friends and family’ be informed about the previously tragic situation, and thus she said succinctly, “He’s alive.”

As if a massive weight lifted, Winston’s heart that had been in his throat finally calmed down.

He heaved a huge sigh of relief as joy came over him. He asked right away, “Can you let him speak... Ah, no. What am I even saying? Joseph must be seriously hurt, right?”

Duh... There wasn’t much left of him besides a slight outline. How could it not be serious? thought Prima to herself.

She then glanced at the old knight slumped over her shoulder. The protective suit she wore was also a sort of exoskeleton as well. Carrying a person was easy, and Prima had also used a strength enhancing elixir on herself.

“He’s fine, but although he survived, he requires time to recover and adapt. During this period, he mustn’t use aether nor exert himself. It’s best to find an absolutely safe space for him to recuperate. Secret Rite Tower ought to bring him back later, and he should be fine after resting for a handful of months.”

“Thank you so much for your help...” Winston expressed his gratitude from the bottom of his heart. Although Prima didn’t say it, Winston knew how hard she had worked during this time as well as how capable she was to have been able to save Joseph from the abyss.

This young lady... or rather, should I say, as expected of someone favored by the bookstore? His previous doubt had really been superfluous.

In this case, there’s nothing to worry about. Winston sucked in a deep breath and went on, “Can you directly bring him to a safe place? There’s no need to return to Secret Rite Tower.”

Prima was slightly taken aback. “A safe place? Are you certain there’s no need to return to Secret Rite Tower? Isn’t he...”

Winston firmly interjected, “I’m certain. I hope that you can also... announce publicly that he’s dead.”

Prima stared at the communications device blankly, unable to process what was going on.

“I know you must be confused, but... Joseph’s life is at stake.”

Joseph’s life = Boss Lin’s mission!

A light bulb lit up in Prima’s mind.

“Alright. There’s no problem with that.” The young lady nodded vigorously. “I will definitely keep this a secret. I swear... I swear on my laboratory.”

Winston replied, “Thank you. Also, please don’t tell me this location. It’s good if only you alone know about it.”

“Mm, hmm,” Prima acknowledged and hung up.

But... where is a safe place? Prima bit her lower lip and thought hard.

To her Truth Union laboratory? It would be convenient with all the

equipment available there and it was a locale Prima was rather familiar with.

But once they reached the Truth Union, Andrew would definitely find out.

“Safe space... safe space...” Prima pondered over it, and naturally, the image of a cold, fair girl with a book in hand seated behind the bar counter of a book cafe came to her mind.

Mu'en.

Mu'en was the night, and the bookstore owner had always been Lady Walpurgis' will.

The safest place in the world was most definitely under the protection of Lady Walpurgis.

Therefore, there surely wouldn't be any problem sending Joseph to the bookstore.

Moreover, Lady Mu'en and Boss Lin aren't human. So, wouldn't that mean that I'm the only one who knows?

With that in mind, Prima changed her route and headed toward the bookstore with Joseph in tow.

Winston turned off the communications device and let out a long sigh.

For Prima, there was only one safe place which others wouldn't know much about. This outcome was what he had been deliberately nudging the young lady toward.

The reason he did so... was very simple.

Winston had a guess, a terrible conjecture, and he wanted to test it: Secret Rite Tower just wanted to make use of Joseph.

This incident had given Winston a different perspective.

Why didn't Secret Rite Tower care whether Joseph died? Because in

their eyes, Joseph wasn't a hero. He was just a tool to test Lin Jie. They never thought of Joseph as the Great Radiant Knight that had protected Secret Rite Tower and Norzin for so many years...

At the thought of Secret Rite Tower being this way, Winston felt his blood run ice cold. He had forgotten that Joseph had already been abandoned once.

And this time, if Joseph failed to advance to Supreme-rank and was seriously hurt, what would the Tower do?

Winston didn't dare to think about it, but he knew that he could no longer trust the Tower.

Even if Joseph was saved, he would fall back into the Tower's hands and might be made use of again. Until every last bit of value was squeezed out of him.

What was Joseph's last bit of value?

Winston reckoned that it could only be the girl that had been transported to the safety point and was still unconscious... Melissa.

From now on, Winston realized that judging the bookstore owner's alignment, and whether his goals were good or evil, was being ridiculous and superfluous.

He had reckoned Norzin's chaos had been caused by Boss Lin; it turned out that he was actually very wrong. This was all a result of human greed...

Winston peered at Caroline, the latter still unconscious with her face smeared with blood.

I can't tell anyone that Joseph is still alive. At least till he recovers his strength.... Winston silently came to his decision.

In the world beyond the battlefield of 67th Avenue, raging blizzards and howling alarms filled the air.

People were in their homes discussing what exactly had happened to cause the internal structure frame of Norzin to decay and

collapse, resulting in such a massive impact.

The surroundings of the bookstore, which was no longer monitored by personnel from Secret Rite Tower nor had any customers, were once again enveloped by a cold silence.

Knock knock—

Rapid knocks on the bookstore's wooden door sounded while Mu'en was still preparing milk tea for the day.

It isn't yet time to open for business. Who could be knocking so anxiously? It can't be Boss Lin, he has the key.

But Boss Lin has already been away for two days. It's almost time for him to return...

Plop—

Mu'en opened the door as a pile of snow fell from the eaves. Then, she saw a familiar face—

"Prima?"

The young girl before her, patting snow off her head, was Mu'en's biggest believer at present.

"Here!" Prima subconsciously called out.

"This is...?" Mu'en eyed the burly man in protective clothing lying beside Prima and asked without any hint of expression.

"It's Mr. Joseph," Prima said quickly. "He needs to be treated somewhere safe, so... this is the only place I could think of."

"I'm glad you call this a safe place, but I'm not asking about his identity—come in first."

She opened the door wider so that Prima could bring Joseph into the bookstore. The white cat, crouching on the bar, rolled around, meowing and shaking its fur.

It wrinkled its nose and sniffed before leaping to Joseph's side, revealing an avaricious gaze as if it had just spotted a supreme delicacy.

Mu'en scooped it up and smacked its little head. "No eating this."

"Meow~" Whitey hung its head regrettably.

Prima opened the protective suit and revealed Joseph within whose body was intertwined with the annihilative substance produced by the domain of Eventuality. The old knight's entire body had been corroded beyond recognition.

"I'm really sorry! I didn't expect his soul to also be affected by the domain of Eventuality. I can only have his physical body recover, but my proficiency when it comes to the spiritual aspect isn't enough."

Having said that, Prima went to quickly prepare medicine once more.

Mu'en quietly watched Prima as she went to work.

A while passed, and seeing that Prima was still at a loss, Mu'en tilted her head and raised a hand. Moonlight-like aether gathered in her palm.

[Sacred Blessing]

With her head lowered and hurriedly flipping through the book, Prima noticed the warm glow of moonlight. She looked up and saw an expressionless Mu'en exuding the power of the night from her hand.

Joseph's skin gradually regrew.

Prima was stunned for a moment but immediately returned to her senses. She watched as the dark night weaved into a cage of moonlight that enveloped Joseph.

Mu'en withdrew her hand and scrutinized Joseph while gathering her strength once more.

[Moonlight Courtyard]

The area enveloped by the moonlight was the territory of the night.
In an instant, Joseph's Supreme-rank aura was completely masked.

Chapter 384: The Final Banquet

Mu'en had completely accepted the goddess of the night Walpurgis' authority and could be considered a new Primordial Witch. Blessings in the form of moonlight-like aether shone on Joseph.

Under this calming moonlight, Joseph's body regenerated at a speed visible to the naked eye and didn't leave behind any scars.

Although Mu'en didn't have an understanding of causation, Joseph was still a customer of the bookstore. Boss Lin wasn't around, so as his able assistant, Mu'en had to take good care of the bookstore's business.

Joseph was a Great Radiant Knight of Secret Rite Tower, yet he didn't return there after suffering such serious injuries.

The problem was rather obvious in that case. Naturally, Mu'en couldn't let Secret Rite Tower notice this place.

Joseph awoke from the chaos and felt the acute pain throughout his body gradually become clearer, as if the burning pain had just reached his body. However, he only frowned slightly. In his many years of being a knight, this little bit of pain was nothing.

His five senses began to recover, and the slight musty smell of books and rich milk tea hit his nose. He opened his eyes slowly and was met with a familiar ceiling.

"You've finally awoken." A young lady's exhausted voice entered his ears. "Great Radiant Knight Joseph."

With some difficulty, Joseph adjusted to look at Prima.

"This is..." Joseph was having problems speaking at the moment due to his newly regenerated vocal cords.

But in truth, he had more or less recognized this place. *This is... Boss Lin's bookstore?*

Prima said in earnest, “This is Boss Lin’s bookstore. Chief Winston asked me to bring you here for recuperation.”

“Boss Lin’s means...”

Prima mulled for a moment, *While it can be said that Vice-Chairman Andrew sent me, it must surely have been Boss Lin’s indirect orders. Therefore, it isn’t wrong to say that Boss Lin got me to come...*

“Yes,” the young girl replied.

Mixed feelings came over Joseph when he heard Prima’s reply. At the same time, he could clearly sense a higher existence still lingering in his body.

As one who had thoroughly ascended to Supreme-rank, Joseph naturally understood the source of this power.

This was the power that belonged to the night and the moon. Only such an existence could conceal his everything and restore his body...

Joseph hurriedly looked around and saw Mu’en seated quietly behind the counter.

“Thank you very much,” Joseph managed to utter after a slight struggle. The doubts he had were quelled but was immediately replaced by shock—even a Primordial Witch was willing to be the assistant of the bookstore owner.

“No need to thank me. You are a veteran customer of the bookstore,” said Mu’en nonchalantly. “This is my job as an assistant. If there’s nothing else, you can continue resting. I still have other things to do.”

This ‘other things to do’ was to continue exploring new milk tea recipes.

Prima said her goodbyes to Mu’en and left rather reluctantly.

Joseph had an empty look in his eyes as he lay on the recliner. The near-death experience had given rise to many thoughts, and he

couldn't help but think about the battle with Wilde.

He had completely decided to die along with Wilde, giving in to fate and ending it all at once. Yet, he never imagined that he would be able to survive this battle... and be saved so casually by Mr. Lin.

There might have been a winner in this battle, but for the first time, Joseph had understood true horror.

A Supreme-rank's domain had always been something that Joseph could only dream of. Now that he had ascended to the realm of Supreme-rank, he now had a better understanding of what an existence that surpassed even Supreme-ranks was like.

Casually being able to reverse time and altering the outcome of battle from across a great distance without so much as batting an eyelid... Lin Jie far surpassed what Joseph could even hope to imagine. In Boss Lin's eyes, the little tricks of Secret Rite Tower were just like the ideas of a child.

How powerful is he exactly...? But between me and Wilde, why did Boss Lin choose me?

"Secret Rite Tower..." Joseph suddenly muttered these three words.

Having fought for Secret Rite Tower for so many years, only to eventually realize he was just being used as a tool by the organization to sound out Boss Lin, Joseph couldn't say that he wasn't affected by this realization. However, surprisingly, he was actually very calm about it.

Perhaps it was because he had expected it from the start. Ever since his wife died, he had been out on missions all the time, yet Secret Rite Tower never ever dissuaded him once.

Joseph stared blankly at the ceiling. *If I had been sent to the Secret Rite Tower, how would they have used me?*

"Thank you, Winston." Joseph sighed.

The pain wrecking his body paled in comparison to the hurt his heart felt, and Joseph could only smile bitterly. He had given his all

to uphold justice and defend Secret Rite Tower and only now did he realize how ridiculous it was.

In any case, the Joseph of the past that had guarded Secret Rite Tower with his all was dead...The present Joseph was the Joseph that had been saved by Boss Lin.

Gazing at the ceiling in silence, he thought about Melissa's pretty face, then recalling her bright, warm smile before she died made Joseph reckon that it was time for him to let go.

Melissa already had sufficient ability to hold her own. Rather than repeat the same mistake as Joseph, it was better to leave a way out from the beginning.

Hatred was the best nourishment for growth, but this time, Joseph would not let Secret Rite Tower dictate their fate.

A16 Manor.

The short earthquake didn't affect the gathering of affluent folk too much. For the Ji Family full of riches, appeasing guests was a rather easy task.

But all good things would come to an end.

The party that had gone on for the past few days was about to reach its conclusion. Lin Jie had already given his present, and the price negotiation for the book distributorship was almost settled.

Ji Bonong and his daughter had treated Lin Jie as a distinguished guest during the past few days of activities. Even ignorant onlookers would come to the understanding that this unassuming bookstore owner wasn't as ordinary as he seemed.

However, regardless of how they tried to get on his good books, whether by beating around the bush or speaking their minds, Lin Jie treated everyone as usual, causing others to deem him even more mysterious and unable to figure him out.

It made other guests feel that this person's shrewdness was simply unfathomable.

After giving his present, Lin Jie calmly began the bargaining technique that he had worked on for a long time. However, it turned out that all his preparations were in vain since regardless of whatever requests he made, the Ji father and daughter were obliging.

Slight guilt even came over Lin Jie as he felt that he had gone overboard. Eventually, he only proposed a half-cooked 30-70 split.

However, Lin Jie who had already thought of all the possible reasons for his request to be rejected was surprised to see the look on Ji Bonong's face. The latter had a determined look as if to say, "Even if I don't earn a single cent, I have to let Mr. Lin's knowledge spread!"

The negotiations were such a breeze that Lin Jie felt a tad guilty despite never feeling like this in his past few years of money-grubbing ways when it came to his business.

"This collaboration can't go any better." Ji Bonong hurriedly extended his hand and shook Boss Lin's hand vigorously. "Boss Lin, you're so generous, kind, and benevolent. I'm looking forward to working with you in the future and I'll definitely do my best to serve you."

Aren't you the generous one? Or should I say that this world has too many easy suckers? I reckon Ji Bonong would agree even if I were to propose a 90-10 split.

But for the sake of future collaborations... Lin Jie restrained himself.

Umm... The image they have established of me seems a little too high.

The price negotiation was supposed to be Lin Jie's highlight of the entire banquet, yet it had been so easily brushed off by Ji Bonong. It was as if this huge matter had already concluded and the last thing to do was just mere formality.

Lin Jie rubbed his chin in thought. *Perhaps... He thinks he's found a confidant. This Ji father and daughter really love reading and respect*

knowledgeable people.

“Boss Lin, please come with me. Let’s attend the final banquet in the outer hall. At the same time, we will announce to everyone that our cooperation has been reached.” Ji Bonong got up and said respectfully.

Ji Zhixiu smiled and gave Lin Jie an elegant bow.

It was already the last day of the entire event, and if it were convenient, perhaps Lin Jie might get to go home tonight. The last night’s banquet was also a free mingling banquet, so all the guests attending it would head to the great hall to prepare for the final night.

It ought to be a fun and happy evening filled with festivities.

Unfortunately, it was a pity that many of the participants were transcendent beings with ulterior motives. They weren’t here to savor the food and wine but were all carefully watching Lin Jie as well as the Jis when they headed in from the side hall.

Of course, everyone was waiting for Ji Bonong to speak, so they didn’t stand out.

The climax of the final banquet had arrived. Ji Bonong stood a little straighter and walked to the center of the hall.

“Everyone, thank you very much for taking the time out of your busy schedules to attend my daughter’s birthday banquet,” Ji Bonong expressed while glancing all around. “I would like to announce something here.”

Lin Jie watched on from behind him with a pleasant smile on his face.

Deep down, he couldn’t help but find it a tad ridiculous. *Haa... Why does this seem like a betrothal no matter how I look at it?*

Ji Bonong then took two steps back and stood at Lin Jie’s side. “The thing at this banquet that makes me feel honored is that Boss Lin and I will be doing business together.”

Lin Jie was taken aback for a moment before he revealed a calm smile. “It’s just a few books. It’s actually my honor to be able to collaborate with Rolle Resource.”

Many guests and banquet-goers were stunned when Lin Jie said these words.

Most guests only focused on the words “collaborate with Rolle Resources” and nothing else.

What sort of company was Rolle Resource? A fearsome enterprise that had monopolized Norzin for centuries. Did it need to collaborate with others? Even the Ash Chamber of Commerce didn’t have such rights. What more this little bookstore without a name.

Meanwhile, the transcendent beings had their attention captured by the words “just a few books.”

Ji Bonong couldn’t control himself, and his excitement showed.

What was there for a person standing at the peak of Norzin in terms of wealth to be excited about?

It couldn’t be anything else... All this time, Ji Bonong had the long-standing regret of not being able to become a transcendent being.

What sort of books were this?

Ones that could defy the long-standing rules and gave Ji Bonong the courage to resist.

The owner of these books—the man smiling faintly behind Ji Bonong. Who exactly was he?

Ji Bonong turned around and waved at the butler, signaling him to hand over the five books.

“The books will be on the market in three days’ time. All who are interested are free to come and have a try.”

A faint murmuring came from the crowd. All transcendent being whoosh. There was a faint commotion below. All the different

transcendent beings appeared to freeze on the spot, then their gazes simultaneously went to the books. With quickened breathing, their avaricious gazes were clear.

Everyone could feel the strange allure of those books, but... they couldn't resist. They didn't wish to resist either. All of them wanted everything within those books.

Chapter 385: It Has Stopped Snowing

As soon as Ji Bonong finished speaking, the entire hall started to stir.

Everyone stared at the five books in unison, their gazes sticking like glue. Regardless of whatever ideas they had previously, there was only one thought left in their minds at this moment—obtain them!

Not all that attended the banquet were transcendent beings; quite a number of ordinary people were in attendance as well. However, even if these ordinary people didn't understand why they were being attracted, they were still gripped by a strong instinct like the scent of a hare to a hunting hound.

Those books had an air of mystery that could bewitch those who saw them as well as invoke great curiosity and desire.

The book covers seemed ordinary, but the styles were unprecedented, as if they had come from another world, and seemed so out-of-place. These books were eye-catching, yet no one seemed to have any impression of them despite racking their brains to see if they recognized them. It was as if only by possessing these books could one see the truth within them.

Perhaps these were pearls left behind from somewhere, waiting for someone to uncover their secrets?

Otherwise, why would the famous Rolle Resource Development Company collaborate with some unknown bookstore owner and announce this news at the birthday banquet of the young heiress?

Therefore, these books must be extremely valuable!

Those transcendent beings present were inspired the moment those books appeared in their field of vision. It was as if they were thrown into a storm, with raindrops pelting down on them with the

terrifying aura emitted by these books.

The things they saw within these books varied, but it all pointed to the peak of power and to certain desires deep within their hearts...

Even if I can't have it, I can't let others have it.

Those who raised their heads and stared straight at the books had unadorned avaricious looks in their eyes. It was as if they had turned into a pack of wild beasts stalking their prey in the darkness and creating a chilling atmosphere.

Oded Renov was a Pandemonium-rank black magician from a central agency of the Central District and held the position of overseer.

Very few people—including transcendent beings—had heard of this agency.

However, in truth, this agency worked closely with a well-known department, the Central Police Unit, and the latter was under the jurisdiction of the former.

Under normal circumstances, if people mentioned that something was a “Central District Directive” and so on, this ‘Central District’ actually referred to the Central District’s central administration.

It was just that most people thought that this ‘Central District’ referred to the lofty nobles and transcendent beings who lived in the Central District.

There were even some ignorant mortals that viewed Rolle Resources as the one giving orders.

Oded would only scoff whenever he heard these theories.

Nobles were nothing but ants while transcendent beings were like grains of loose sand. However... the most ridiculous Rolle Resource theory was slightly closer to the truth.

Because Rolle Resource was also under the control of the central administration.

A thousand years ago, when Norzin was still a human country and Rolle Resource was still an expeditionary army sent by the country to explore the underground ruins, the latter had been a tool of the former.

A thousand years later, Norzin had become a completely man-made steel city. Those in power back then had become the central administration that controlled everything, while the army forged with iron and blood had progressed under the guise of a company.

However, a tool would always remain a tool. No matter how powerful a tool appeared, it could only serve its owner.

And in order to prevent this tool from having inappropriate ideas, the position of overseer was established.

Of course, during the yearly banquet held by Ji Bonong every year to invite rich merchants and transcendent beings which was considered by the central administration to be a ‘dangerous’ period, Oded, as overseer, naturally couldn’t be absent.

He had already reported to the higher-ups when Lin Jie showed up.

Although information on Lin Jie was restricted by Secret Rite Tower, the central administration had the authority to access the database. This bookstore owner was a focal point that the central administration paid much attention to.

Later on, whenever there were other anomalies, especially when Greg had asked Lin Jie for help, Oded had reported accordingly.

However, the central administration’s response was to continue observing as per the norm.

Oded couldn’t figure out what the intent of the higher-ups were, so he could only remain vigilant and continue observing the movements of Ji Bonong and Lin Jie.

And as the banquet was coming to a close, he had thought that this work assignment would end rather smoothly.

Yet he never imagined for there to be such a twist—

Rolle Resource and that bookstore... working together?!

Oded's eyes opened wide. His subconscious reaction was that he needed to report this to the central administration, but the thought running through his mind was, 'I'm really going to make a huge contribution this time!'

The higher-ups always suspected that Ji Bonong had ulterior motives, but this fellow hid it very well and usually didn't give anything away. As for his daughter, she should have died a long time ago...

Just that she had unexpectedly gotten involved with that mysterious bookstore.

However, even if the higher-ups could allow Ji Zhixiu to continue her involvement with the bookstore, they could never allow Rolle Resource to officially work together with the bookstore owner.

This time round, once he immediately reported this up, the central administration would be able to catch Ji Bonong's vile intentions. And that would be the greatest credit Oded could get as overseer!

However, these thoughts he had only lasted till he saw those five books.

"Those are...?!"

Oded paused his activation of a communication spell midway and stared fixedly at the books.

His gaze went from blank, then confused to shock, and finally one of utter avarice.

After a while, he lowered his hands and gave up on the communication spell, instead, continuing to stare at the books as he slowly retreated into the shadows behind him, blending into the darkness and disappearing.

He had been in the corner to begin with, so his silent movements didn't attract anyone's attention.

But at the same time, he could sense many of the other transcendent beings in the banquet doing the same as him.

Franca, who attended the banquet as a representative of her family clan of white magicians, was seated in a corner of the hall. Fidgeting nervously with her hands on her lap, she looked around the hall in puzzlement.

Though she could sense that something was strange with the current atmosphere, she didn't know what had happened.

Rolle Resource working with a bookstore to develop a collaborative partnership was indeed a big worth of a big hoo-ha, but the reactions of other people seemed very off...

The young lady saw the terrifying smiles on the people around her that were frozen like statues. That strange avaricious glints in their eyes made her unconsciously shrink back.

Could it be... that there's something very different about those books?

At the thought of this, the young lady mustered up her courage. She turned gaze past her male companion and guard in front of her, trying her best to make out what the books looked like.

Unfortunately, with her ordinary vision, even if she tried her hardest, she could only see the title of the book closest to her.

“One Thousand... Classic... Home-dishes?”

Franca stumbled over the words, which left her with huge question marks.

She squinted and blinked several times to make sure she wasn't seeing it wrong.

Rolle Resource and that bookstore are working together to sell... recipes?

Franca wanted to comment that this didn't quite make sense, but she realized that even if they did really sell recipes, there wasn't much to criticize.

Perhaps, that mysterious looking bookstore owner wants to test the sincerity of Rolle Resource? Hmm... It does make sense if I think about it this way.

But isn't he afraid that Rolle Resource would get upset if he uses such a ridiculous method to test their sincerity? Or should I say he is fearless?

Franca pinched the corner of her blouse and whispered to her male companion, "Mike... Who is that bookstore owner?"

The young man in front of her turned around. He had a chiseled and handsome face, but Franca knew that he was actually a powerful hunter who still had a stable mental state.

Injected within him was sordid blood belonging to the Supreme-rank dream beast, Mobius Snake, a creature that could distort space and connect all distances in the world.

Although Franca had almost nonexistent transcendent ability, she was the only progeny of the family head. Even if one half of her parentage was an ordinary human, she was still given the tightest protection.

At this moment, Mike's eyes had turned into beady serpentine pupils. The sides of his face and neck were covered in scales with dark purple veins bulging. It seemed as if he was about to go out of control.

However, a string of runes appeared on the surface of his skin. These runes were like chains that firmly restrained his movements, preventing him from ever harming his master. On top of that, it helped him retain a hint of his rationality.

Hiss...

Mike was forced to kneel down and looked toward his young mistress. Pain was written all over his face as he shook his head and tried his best to control himself. However, he couldn't resist the beckoning that came from his instincts.

With difficulty, he hissed hoarsely, "It's... He's... Supreme... I saw it... book... want..."

He raised his head, with the same greed-laden expression that so many others had, and said in a trembling voice, “My Lady, do you want a book?”

Franca was still trying to work out what “Supreme” meant. With a sigh, she subconsciously looked toward that recipe book and her face flushed red.

Being a child of an esteemed white magician family, it was rather embarrassing to not have any talent in spells.

But... she was really more interested in cooking.

“Alright.” Franca pretended to be troubled and extended a finger. “Just one book. And say that it was your idea when we get back!”

Mike lowered his head, hiding the corners of his lips. “Yes, my lady.”

“Five books?!”

Greg stared at the five books, so utterly dumbfounded that his disconsolate sentiments were tossed aside.

After witnessing the reversal of time, the suspected outcome was that Joseph and Wilde had perished together. There was only news that Melissa had been teleported to a safety point. Regardless of how mentally strong Greg was, this was really torturous for him.

He didn’t have the guts to ask for anything more from Boss Lin and spent the last two days in a blurry daze.

All he could do was believe that Joseph didn’t die.

However, at this moment, the appearance of those five books abruptly pulled him out of his daze and left him shaking in fright.

Greg’s thoughts returned to the day where he had barged into the side hall. *Boss Lin and Ji Bonong... Was that what they were discussing back then?!*

However, he and everyone else had been distracted by Joseph’s fate

at that point of time. Who would have imagined that... this demon would actually bring out five books at one go, and now it seemed that they would be printed in batches in the future?!!!

“What exactly is he trying to do?” Greg was terrified. He could almost imagine the whole of Norzin embroiled in chaos...

I've got to report this to Secret Rite Tower as soon as possible!

Secret Rite Tower...

Greg suddenly hesitated.

Even Teacher Joseph was a pawn used by them to probe and please Boss Lin... Under such circumstances, would they really care?

“No no no! What am I even thinking!”

Greg shook his head violently. Gritting his teeth, he activated his communications device.

Beside him, Charlotte hugged her book tightly in her arms and smiled at Greg. “Don’t waste your efforts. Nobody will come to be the savior. When doomsday arrives, everyone just wants to save themselves. No one would come and sacrifice themselves willingly.”

Greg replied coldly, “Wilde is dead, and Corpse Devouring Sect’s remaining followers will soon be rounded up. How are you still in the mood to make sarcastic remarks?”

Charlotte’s smile didn’t change. “Death isn’t eternal. If Master Wilde returns to the embrace of God, I will be the next successor and continue to preside over the Corpse Devouring Sect. Me leaving here means that the Corpse Devouring Sect will continue existing. And now is a good opportunity for an apprentice knight like you to formally become a proper knight...”

The corners of her lips curled into a mocking grin. “Do you dare try and stop me?”

“...”

Through gritted teeth, Greg clenched his fists tightly.

However, he had to admit that he really wasn't confident of holding down Charlotte.

"Heh..." Charlott's grin widened. "One day, you'll understand which is truly the right path."

A spy from the Ash Chamber of Commerce hidden amongst the crowd stealthily tapped some unknown signals on his communications device while using a special spell array to communicate.

Many leagues away, the dark elf elders of the Ash Chamber of Commerce began to piece together the information bit by bit.

"That bookstore owner is actually collaborating with Rolle Resource?! And Wilde is dead..."

In the dark underground, a man asked in surprise, "What's going on? Wasn't it said that Cherry's ability came from the bookstore? Is he going to give up on Cherry?!"

"I never imagined those two ordinary mortal tools of the Ji Family would actually obtain such a fate..."

Another wizened voice chimed in, "After the death of the brood-mother, the fate of us dark elves has become even bleaker."

"It's not exactly too bad for us this way. Wouldn't it be easy for us once Cherry loses her backer?" A woman's voice cackled. "She's just a mixed-blood. What qualifications does she have to direct the Ash Chamber of Commerce?"

"Since this is so, let's take action once Cherry returns," said the first male voice.

"Boss Lin, what do you think?" Ji Bonong personally held the five books in his hands. After showing them off, the books were placed into an exquisite brass case that had been specially prepared. The entire thing had been rather ritualistic.

Just as he had expected... These people hadn't come to Miss Ji's banquet to sincerely give their well wishes. All of them were like sharks having caught the scent of blood in water and wanted to pry into Rolle Resources and learn of the company's trends.

Only benefits and self-interest benefited them.

Lin Jie observed those guests that were blinded by benefits and revealed a smile. "Well, as long as you think it's appropriate. I feel like those books should be rather easy to sell. After all, they're books with a lower threshold.

"If there are many more people who like these, you can come to get more from me. In any case, I still hope that more people can share and enjoy these interesting books..."

Ji Bonong glanced at the group of people beneath the stage radiating with ambition as they gazed at the books like ravenous wolves. "Don't worry. I will definitely make sure you are satisfied."

With that, he announced that the banquet had come to a successful end. The crowd in the great hall remained bubbling for a while before starting to disperse.

Afterwards, Lin Jie and Ji Bonong chatted for a little while more in the side hall.

Noticing the color of the sky, Boss Lin stood up. "Alright, it's about time. Thank you very much, Mr. Ji and Miss Ji, for letting me spend three very pleasant days here."

"It's our honor!" replied the Ji father and daughter pair at once.

When they walked Lin Jie to the side gate, the young dark-haired man suddenly looked up and said in surprise, "Haa, it has stopped snowing..."

He turned around, flashing a wide smile and waving. "Just walking me here will do. The snow hasn't melted yet, so be careful on your way back."

Chapter 386: Price Of Free-Riding

“The snow hasn’t melted yet...”

The young man walked away, his outline gradually fading into the night. However, those meaningful words and that parting gaze still seemed to linger before them.

The Ji father and daughter pair stood solemnly in the cold wind for a long time, only till Lin Jie could no longer be seen did they exchange glances with each other.

Ji Zhixiu was silent as she watched guests leaving in succession via the main entrance in the distance. The bustle throughout the past three days was slowly dissipating and returning the huge manor to its original emptiness and silence.

Suddenly, the corners of her lip curled up as she said profoundly, “A man’s wealth is his own ruin... This is what Boss Lin once said to me.”

Ji Bonong asked helplessly as he stepped back into the courtyard, “Do you have to speak to me in riddles? What Boss Lin means is clear as day. Are you afraid that I won’t understand?”

“The greed of human hearts has always been immeasurable...” he lamented.

Ji Zhixiu followed after, her smile widening. “But I’m just afraid that their strength can’t match up.”

As the guests dispersed, A16 manor, which had been bustling for three consecutive days, fell completely silent. It was as if the songs, dancing, and festivities of today were all an illusion.

Ji Bonong headed along the partial-open corridor, gazing at the still dark and gloomy sky above the garden despite the snowfall having

come to a halt.

To him, this familiar scenery was completely different from the past.

He lowered his head and eyed his palm. Power gathered within him after he became a transcendent being. Surging aether filled every corner of his body as if excited and restlessly anticipating something.

Ji Zhixiu followed behind with the brass case containing the five books in her arms. She could clearly hear the old butler's voice coming from the side hall, giving orders for the servants to tidy up the place. Even the sound of melting snow outside seemed so distinct and clear to her.

These sounds both loud and soft were all mixed together, and hearing it all was not annoying and frightening.

Ji Bonong took a deep breath.

Looks like... he still needed some time to get used to this power.

Or rather... he needed a chance to practice and gain proficiency.

Ji Bonong stopped abruptly in his tracks, the corners of his lips curling into a contemptuous smile. Calmly, he said, "If you covet these five books, please come and get them in three days according to the rules. The highest bidder gets them, while everything else is out of the question. I've been doing business for so many years and never had the habit of giving special treatment to others."

His voice echoed through the empty hallway. A moment later, a hoarse, male voice answered—

"Heh, President Ji is really ambitious..."

A person in a hooded black robe suddenly materialized from the shadows at the end of the corridor.

Following that, as if having been signaled, there were whooshing sounds all around, and several transcendent beings appeared in a

variety of ways around them, all familiar faces to Ji Bonong. They hadn't even bothered removing their banquet outfits, nor had any intention of hiding.

Ji Bonong glanced around and chuckled. "Didn't all of you leave? Or was the snowfall too heavy so you guys wished to stay at my humble abode?"

"Don't play dumb, Ji Bonong."

The leading black magician removed his hood, revealing a sinister face filled with avarice. It was the overseer, Oded.

The black magician's gaze was firmly fixed on the case held by Ji Zhixiu. "You were the one who broke the rules first. Rolle Resource can only be helmed by mortals, yet now you wish to be above transcendents..."

A ceremonial knife slipped out of the black magician's sleeves into Oded's hand as he assumed a combat posture.

"You aren't qualified to hold these five books!" he growled.

Ji Bonong scoffed. "It's not up to you to decide whether I'm qualified or not."

Oded's eyes narrowed. "Does that mean you're going to publicly disobey the central administration's command and betray the mission Rolle Resource has had since its inception?"

Ji Bonong let out a long sigh. "Mission? You mean being the dogs of transcendents like you people? Generation after generation, every president of Rolle Resource has just been the dogs for you people! There will never be a day when I can turn the tables if I live under your surveillance, only being controlled and abiding by the fate that has been laid out for me."

He glanced at his tightly clenched fists. "I've had enough..."

Oded sneered. "Had enough? This lofty status and near-endless wealth. A life that many people can only dream of, and yet you feel it isn't enough. Could it be that your greed knows no bounds? Looks

like you've really been bewitched and brainwashed by that bookstore. I have to get rid of you, you damned pest!"

Before he even finished, Oded had already turned into a black shadow and shot forth. He appeared behind Ji Bonong in a flash and raised the ceremonial knife while mouthing an incantation. At the same time, the other transcents also activated their abilities toward the two Jis caught in the middle.

At the moment they approached—

"You're right. The greed of the human heart is immeasurable indeed."

Ji Bonong raised his head, revealing moving black meridians on his face that were like wriggling black worms. His lips morphed into a frightening smile as he said, "Not just you guys, but... me as well."

Squelch—

The sound of flesh being torn rang out. One of the Pandemonium-rank transcents, who was still blinded by greed, felt as if his abdomen was pierced by an invisible palm. Blood splattered throughout the corridor as his viscera leaked out from the perforation.

That individual's facial expression hadn't even changed yet, still half malevolent and half in shock.

He looked at the huge hole in the abdomen and started to sway. But before he hit the deck, his body was ripped up in the next moment, and his severed limbs hit the ground.

It was as if the corridor was caught up in a rainstorm of blood.

Oded's pupils constricted. The other transcents were all frightened and stopped in their tracks, but at the same time, none of them chose to flee because the temptation of those five books in the brass case was too strong.

Ji Bonong has indeed become a transcendent being! This thought flashed across Oded's mind.

It was rather obvious that this was the bookstore owner's doing. According to intelligence reports, Lin Jie and Ji Bonong had only been alone for not more than a few hours. Yet now, the latter was able to instantly kill off a Pandemonium-rank transcendent being.

The importance placed by the central administration wasn't groundless indeed...

"This is what you are relying on?" Oded shouted furiously. "You really betrayed the central administration! You are dead! We will not tolerate a transcendent controlling Rolle Resource. Both you and that Lin Jie are dead!"

"When Boss Lin said that the snow hadn't melted yet, he was referring to remnants of the old era like you, right? Heh, I don't need the central administration to tolerate me. Just let them be as angry as they want."

Ji Bonong remained where he was as an invisible force swept across once more and cut another transcendent being in half. Spreading his arms wide, he declared, "From today on, Rolle Resource will leave the central administration and head toward its own freedom and independence! Do you see it? The era of freedom is arriving. We control ourselves!

"The battle has been decided. Winter shall pass and spring is about to arrive. It is something that no one can stop. When the sun shines, snow will definitely melt."

As soon as Ji Bonong finished speaking, one of the hunters among the group erupted with strength and charged forward, incited by the rampant greed in his heart as well as the stimulation of blood. In an instant, his rationality was completely devoured by the sordid blood as he transformed into a beast that shot forth like a blur.

His strength and speed had reached the extremes, and he even dodged Ji Bonong's attack.

Ji Bonong's attention was diverted toward this opponent for a moment.

At this moment, Oded suddenly raised an arm, and the sleeves of his black robe slipped down, revealing a strange hand-bell carved from pale bones.

This was a ceremonial item of a strange, ancient tribe from the Lower District as well as a sub Supreme-rank transcendent object, capable of producing a tinkling that even Destructive-rank couldn't withstand.

"I'll let you understand that your wishful thinking is nothing but a pipe dream!" Oded sneered as he rang the bell. "You are only fit to be stepping stones for my advancement!"

The entire corridor was distorted as the place began to fall into an illusion. It was as if countless mirrors all around were reflecting light, making it impossible to distinguish between reality and illusion.

"Advancement... Haha, what about these five books? Are you prepared to hand them over to the central administration? If you're truly loyal to the central administration, you should have reported to them directly and not come alone, Oded," mocked Ji Bonong. "To still be finding excuses for your greed at this time, you people are truly beyond saving. Is there a need for such trash to exist in our world?"

"Better to lessen the burden of this world, huh..." muttered to himself.

Those transcendent beings, who were ripped apart by Ji Bonong and lying on the ground still breathing, let out heart-wrenching roars, which, when accompanied by the crisp tinkling of the bell, were incredibly ear-piercing.

Oded prepared himself to hear a wail he would find most pleasurable, then suddenly stopped in his tracks as his eyes widened.

Ji Bonong had disappeared all of a sudden.

Or rather, he had become something else.

With his back turned to the night sky, Ji Bonong's body greatly expanded, casting a shadow over Oded. The immaculate suit he wore was torn apart as he became a colossus—

Ji Bonong's eyes became incomparably huge, and countless worms squirmed within like the bubbling surface of boiling water.

"You... you... you?!" Oded was horrified, and his brain seemed incapable of functioning.

No, this definitely isn't transcendent... Goddamn, what has that bookstore owner done?!

"Hah...Ha-ha-ha-ha...!" Ji Bonong's delighted chortling sounded as if many different voices were overlapping. "Is the current me still that same mortal in your eyes? Overseer, you've watched me for so many years. Have you seen enough yet?"

Then the colossal thing's abdomen gradually opened up, his body becoming flat and elongated like a leather back. And when his abdomen was fully opened, what was within weren't internal organs but many pairs of hands.

"Come, have a closer look..."

"AHHHH—"

Oded let out a shrill scream. His rationality, which had been muddled by the five books, finally returned to him. He desperately wanted to escape this sorry state, but the countless hands that reached out from Ji Bonong's body grabbed hold of him and pulled him in.

Ji Bonong sneered and closed up his body, which then shrank back to his original form. Glancing at the blood-soaked corridor, he muttered, "You have to pay a price if you try to take Boss Lin's books for free..."

Chapter 387: Hi, Boss Lin

Greg was still in a state of stupor when he stepped out of the manor's main gates.

He halted and looked back, observing the other guests whose faces seemed to have some sort of strange glow that he couldn't sense. At first, they seemed to be really happy with the banquet's conclusion, but in truth, everyone was greedily licking their lips as if wanting to bite a piece of succulent meat.

The cold wind blew and Greg shivered. Then, he jerked his head toward the depths of the manor and inhaled sharply.

Just for a moment, he had sensed extremely strong aether fluctuations, at least seven or eight of them. But in just an instant, only one—the strongest—remained.

And now, he couldn't even sense that one.

However, Greg could imagine that at that moment, there must have been several transcendent beings who couldn't hold themselves back and reached out for those five books. Then... they all died.

"It's not that hard to figure it out... Ji Bonong publicly announced his collaboration with the bookstore because he isn't afraid of others trying to steal them. These bunch have their rationality completely affected by those five books."

There would likely be... another blood-bath at A16 manor in three days' time.

Greg shook his head and couldn't help but grimace.

In fact, how could he believe that he himself hadn't already been influenced by the bookstore owner? Otherwise, why would he start to have slight distrust of Secret Rite Tower...

"Speaking of which, I haven't seen Fitch since I ran to the side hall

looking for Boss Lin,” muttered Greg as he looked around. “Something has been wrong with him ever since he gained a portion of that Supreme-rank’s memory and learned that he was a test subject of the Path of the Flaming Sword. I wonder where he’s gone to?

“And Charlotte... Wait, where’s she?!”

He suddenly became alert and returned to his senses, running against the crowd and glancing all around to get a glimpse of Charlotte.

She had been with him just a moment ago, yet disappeared in the blink of an eye when he was distracted.

Damn it! I let her escape... Greg cursed inwardly.

He had contacted once more after the matter concluded, and Secret Rite Tower would immediately send personnel over to capture Wilde’s aide with the code-name of ‘Snowflake.’

Yet, at such a crucial juncture, Greg had let her escape.

Panting heavily, Greg stopped somewhere in the manor and pounded the wall beside him. He had a very ugly look on his face and, at the same time, he felt extremely dejected.

His teacher’s fate was unknown, and he couldn’t even accomplish such a simple task...

Just as he was greatly disheartened, he looked up for a moment and saw the ice-cold aristocratic young lady smiling at him from the opposite corner. She elegantly lifted the hems of her skirt and gave him a curtsy.

Without Charlotte’s arms covering the book over her chest, its appearance was now fully revealed. The edges of the book were fascia flesh, connecting the book to Charlotte’s clothes and the skin around it. Right at the center was a mouth full of sharp teeth with a thick forked tongue inside, swaying about like a snake, waiting for an opportunity to strike.

A sticky corrosive fluid dripped from the tongue, making a spine-chilling sizzle as it hit the ground.

Greg was taken aback, his face turning pale as he subconsciously took half a step backward.

However, for some reason, a gleam of light caught his attention. There was now a strange yet gorgeous ring on her previously unadorned finger. The scarab-shaped gem was extremely eye-catching.

Charlotte stuck out her own tongue revealing the teleportation array inscription on it. "We'll meet again. Send my regards to Joseph. He won't be so lucky next time..."

The usually cold voice of that young lady seemed strangely fused with another older voice.

"You!!!" Greg snapped back to his senses. With widened eyes, he reached his hand out and took a few steps forward.

However, the young lady had already vanished.

Fitch had already left Area A and returned to 136th Avenue, where he had spent the most of the year wandering at; randomly picking an alley in this slum and sat down.

He rolled up his sleeves and eyed his semi-translucent arm that was constantly twitching.

The colorful skin rippled constantly like the surface of water, occasionally emitting flashes of light that appeared to take physical form as they dispersed into the air as if they were connected to a certain crack.

"Huu..." Fitch trembled and raised his head, revealing half of his already assimilated face.

A huge energy was gathering and bubbling restlessly within his body. If not for trying his hardest to control it, he would have blown up right away like a water balloon.

Haniel's complete death had caused all of her power to leak out.

While most of the power had erupted between spatial and dream cracks, it had formed a spatial turbulence which caused a large part of Norzin's underground frame to collapse.

However, a portion of that power was drawn toward a higher concentration of the same mysticism and surged toward Fitch, who had previously obtained a part of Haniel's power.

And when Haniel died, it wasn't only her power that dissipated but her innate control over time as well.

In other words, after the death of Haniel, her power and authority over time were all inherited by Fitch.

In fact, the Clock-wheel Worms squirming around at a loss having lost their only Supreme-rank now sensed the new ownership of authority and thus rebelled and went to support Fitch.

At this moment, the corporeal glimmers of light on Fitch's body was his connection to these Clock-wheel Worms.

The void rippled, and a figure in a thick and tattered black robe appeared.

"How can this be? How could Haniel have died?! She wields time! Such a powerful domain concept..."

There was shock in the Void Intermediary's voice.

The other 'Angels' had already arrived for the current Path of the Flaming Sword gathering, and only Haniel was late. Sandalphon, the original contact, had died. Thus Zaphkiel, who could freely travel through the void, assumed the role and went forth to search for Haniel.

But shortly after he had followed the information provided by the void and came, he sensed the fall of Haniel. He spent the next two days searching but to no avail.

No matter how much Zaphkiel thought about it, he had no choice

but to accept this fact.

“Looks like I can only return... This bookstore owner really has to be dealt with carefully. In just half a year, several Supreme-ranks have fallen in succession, and even Haniel...”

Just as Zaphkiel was about to leave, he suddenly received new information from the void.

“Hmm? This is... Why would the Clock-wheel Worms suddenly... They still have a Supreme-rank?!”

Zaphkiel’s tentacles tore through the void as he followed the flow of information and came to a small alley.

In that dark alley, a lanky young man seated on the curb was dressed rather sloppily, but flowing lights glowed brightly on the parts of his body that were exposed. Countless rays and gleams of colorful light passed through the gaps in time and connected with those Clock-wheel Worms on the man’s body.

While the young man’s appearance and bearing wasn’t at all similar to Haniel’s, the powerful aura of authority over time couldn’t be faked.

Zaphkiel breathed a sigh of relief as he appeared before the young man and said, “I knew you didn’t die... Dividing a portion of your power to occupy this mortal’s body, sacrificing a rook to save the king. How decisive indeed, Haniel.”

Fitch was, at first, stunned when he eyed the unfamiliar Supreme-rank in black robes. Then, drawing out memories of this being from Haniel’s memories, he raised an eyebrow and revealed a knowing smile. “Yes... It was too dangerous this time round.”

Fitch then got up and dusted off his clothes, acting casual and asked nonchalantly, “Why are you looking for me, Zaphkiel? Where’s Sandalphon? You don’t seem the sort to be a messenger.”

While Zaphkiel did feel somewhat strange for a moment, his doubt faded the moment Fitch mentioned both his name and Sandalphon’s.

He took a step forward, made the void expand and cover the area, bringing the two of them to the place of the original covenant.

“Sandalphon is dead... Let’s talk about that later. You are the only one left for this gathering. Hurry up. We must make the dream barrier crumble this time round. Also that bookstore owner... You nearly died at his hands this time, but that would mean you were able to sense his true strength. It would be of great help to us...

“It’s time to work together and eliminate this threat!”

The Truth Union, Machine Loop.

The lower levels that had collapsed were not utter ruins. At present, many scholars in exoskeleton suits were cleaning up, lifting and removing debris and placing them aside.

“How long will this take...” A scholar working in a corner quietly complained to a companion beside him, “I haven’t finished my project yet.”

His comrade sighed. “Just be content. Kleist’s and the labs of many others are right here among these ruins.” Stamping his foot on some of the wreckage, he continued, “All their data is lost, and the projects have to be started from scratch again.”

The first scholar was slightly taken back for a moment, then he started gloating, “For real? I remember that their experiments had already been going on for two whole years. If they were to do it all over... Tsk, tsk tsk.”

His waist and legs immediately felt less sore, and he could continue digging up another ten tons of rubble with no issue.

Creak...

The scholar who was chatting with his comrade suddenly paused. He vaguely saw some movement in the ruins a short distance in front of them as if something was about to come out from below.

A chill ran down his spine, and he thought to himself, *No way...*

Clang!

A slender hand suddenly emerged from beneath a pile of rubble.

“Ahhh!” The scholar took two steps back in horror and fell to the ground, causing his companion to raise his gun warily. “What is it?!”

“Oh... Rick? And... Yalvis?”

A dust-clad woman with long black hair slowly got up from the rubble and patted her tattered white coat. Her sky-blue eyes were like prismatic gems that surveyed the two as she pushed her glasses higher up the bridge of her nose.

The two scholars were flabbergasted. “Chair-Chairman Maria?! You are still alive... No, why did you come out from there? Weren’t you in seclusion to break through to Supreme-rank?”

“Yes, yes. I was indeed trying to break through to Supreme-rank, but the method was somewhat special and now I’m out... It seems like Andrew has done something incredible while I was away, huh.”

Maria glanced around, then looked up, meeting the somewhat sinister gaze of Andrew who was looking down from high above. With a bright smile, she took out a notebook and waved it. “I found something interesting in the Lower District.”

Lin Jie hummed a tune as he strolled over the snowy ground on his way back to the bookstore.

“I wonder if anything happened to Mu’en during the days I was away?”

While freeloading on free and drinks at the manor has been fun, the bookstore still gives me a much greater sense of security. As the saying goes, there’s no place like home...

He took out the key and opened the door. As he entered, he announced loudly, “I’m back! Mu’en...”

Lin Jie stopped in his tracks and stared at that old and familiar face

lying on the recliner with bandages all over his body.

Joseph struggled to raise a hand in greeting. “Hi, Boss Lin.”

Chapter 388: He's Implying

“Hi, Boss Lin.” Joseph forced a smile and tried his best to not appear as miserable as he looked.

Lin Jie was dumbfounded for some time before he reacted, “Those injuries, they aren’t light... Much more serious than I thought...”

While he knew that Joseph had been out on a Secret Rite Tower mission, Lin Jie hadn’t expected the mission to be so dangerous that Joseph would get seriously hurt.

Joseph smiled bitterly. *As expected, I’ve disappointed Boss Lin. Boss Lin predicted my failure, but he never expected me to fail this miserably.*

“Is it a Secret Rite Tower mission? To think that this would be the extent...” Boss Lin tried to keep his surprise in check as he took off his umbrella and coat, which he handed to Mu’en. Mu’en took the items and hung them in the room before slinking away into the darkness.

Whitey came over and brushed itself on Lin Jie as if it hadn’t seen its owner in a long time. Lin Jie reciprocated by gently stroking the cat’s head.

Secret Rite Tower mission... Joseph sighed inwardly. For a certain point of view, it was indeed a Secret Rite Tower mission that had reduced him to such a sorry state.

Even though he was being reminded by Lin Jie, Joseph still wasn’t used to venting his anger at Secret Rite Tower. Thus, he replied, “It was Wilde. I had a big fight with him and all my injuries were caused by him.”

Lin Jie frowned and finally had a confirmation of what he had always suspected... Wilde had indeed gone down the wrong path.

Lin Jie couldn’t help but sigh. He didn’t know how Wilde was doing, but he might just have to feed the old empty nester a few

more servings of chicken soup to get him back onto the right path. At that moment, Lin Jie felt that he was burdened with even more important responsibilities.

But... how could a lonely old man like Wilde overcome the robust Joseph... Oh, right. Wilde has a dog. Ahh, could Wilde have set his dog loose on Joseph...? Lin Jie thought to himself as he gazed sympathetically at Joseph.

Met with such a gaze, Joseph could only hang his head in shame as if he were a student that had done something wrong.

“Since you are already here, just rest up well,” said Lin Jie generously. Then he turned to Mu’en and instructed, “Let’s clean up the basement together. He can’t stay in the bookstore all the time. It’s not a conducive area for recuperating.”

Mu’en paused for a moment to think about the situation in the basement, but immediately nodded after. “Yes, Boss Lin.”

Thus, Lin Jie opened the door to the basement. Besides some junk and that ancient dragon fossil that Cherry had given him, there was not much else there. Moreover, Mu’en had kept the place rather tidy.

Mu’en followed behind, helping Joseph along into the dusky basement. The moment they entered, the old knight’s body froze up.

He subconsciously glanced at the expressionless Mu’en and Lin Jie, who had his arms on his hips. Both of them seemed to be their usual calm selves as if this was nothing more than an ordinary room.

However, the moment they entered, Joseph had sensed traces of vast aether. Even though these were mere traces, it seemed vast like an ocean and it wasn’t hard to imagine that such powerful aether had once filled this place...

Joseph’s entire body trembled. Such powerful aether made him feel suffocated.

Mu'en helped Joseph into a chair.

Joseph, who had already reached Supreme-rank, felt that what he knew of the world was just a drop in the ocean. He could clearly imagine how this vast aether that used to be here could kill him ever so easily.

Joseph didn't dare to move much. He slowly adjusted himself on the chair and accidentally brushed the table beside.

Hiss—

A chill ran down Joseph's spine. When he touched the table again, he seemed to hear an Ancient Dragon roar with an aura full of calamity. There seemed to be unwillingness and anger in the vastness. That angry roar was like a furious hurricane hitting him straight in the face...

Joseph's eyes widened. This tiny basement seemed to have once trapped a dragon.

If he were any ordinary person, such immense mysticism would have driven him insane...

Joseph took several deep breaths to calm himself. Once more, he was faced with the true power of the bookstore owner. This increasing terror made Joseph clearly realize that he was merely an ant that could be squished anytime in the face of such an entity. As such, he was much more willing to accept the charity that was so casually being shown to him.

Lin Jie saw Joseph's face pale and quickly went to work setting up an old, unused bed.

"What's the current situation with you? Of course, you are free to stay with me as long as you want, but don't you have to report back? It's a Secret Rite Tower Mission, after all," said Lin Jie.

Joseph hung his head and was silent for a while. No one could tell what was on his mind. Each time Lin Jie mentioned Secret Rite Tower, Joseph felt as if he was being repeatedly roasted over a grill.

Seeing Joseph go quiet, Lin Jie asked in earnest, "Since it's a Secret Rite Tower mission, there should be reimbursement and insurance, right?"

These are things that most ordinary companies would have, right? Moreover, Secret Rite Tower seems like a government bureau, so they should be more comprehensive. Joseph can't be that naive to not ask about such things, right? Don't tell me he didn't even sign a contract?

"Ah?" Joseph replied subconsciously, making it appear as if he had never heard of such a term. "N-no."

An astounded Lin Jie muttered, "What kind of black-hearted company is this? How inhumane. You've been cheated..."

A glimmer of realization flashed in Joseph's eyes when he heard this, his head jerking up to gaze dejectedly at the tall back of Lin Jie's.

Is he trying to tell me of Secret Rite Tower's true nature? Moreover, he's being this direct. Perhaps my repeated hesitation has made Boss Lin lose his patience.

"You're right. I came to my senses too late."

"It's not too late yet." Lin Jie turned around and smiled at the old knight. "You've now understood they are just an exploitative company, so don't go there anymore."

"Yes, yes, I understand," Joseph replied at once.

Lin Jie pulled out the large bed that had just been tidied up in one go. Patting the dust off his hands, he asked, "What are your plans from now on?"

Joseph felt it hard to face Lin Jie's question directly. In truth, he was rather confused and wished to get answers from Lin Jie, yet the latter had given him such a direct question which could likely be Boss Lin's test for him.

"...I still need to think about it," answered Joseph. Then he naturally thought of Melissa, the person he was the most concerned

about in this world. “Perhaps this is the only opportunity. I wish for Melissa to be truly independent. Most importantly, perhaps me being alive might be Melissa’s greatest hindrance.”

If Secret Rite Tower knows that I’m still alive, it’s possible that Melissa would be implicated... Joseph clenched his fist tightly while in silent thought.

Lin Jie blinked several times, completely unable to understand what Joseph was going on about.

No way... Does anyone really fake their death to let their own children grow up and be independent?!

Lin Jie couldn’t keep up with Joseph’s train of thought, but the dynamics of this father-daughter pair had always seemed peculiar. It wouldn’t be right for him to meddle with the family affairs of others, so Lin Jie just nodded.

What an awkward father-daughter pair...

Joseph was slightly moved when he saw Lin Jie nod.

It appears that’s the answer Boss Lin is looking for, but that indirectly verifies Secret Rite Tower might use me to try and control Melissa if they knew I’m still alive...

If everything before had been just a guess, Lin Jie’s acknowledgment left Joseph completely disheartened.

Secret Rite Tower... Why am I forced to this point?

“Just be at ease and rest here,” Lin Jie finally said after hesitating for a moment. Then he beckoned to Mu’en, and the goddess of the night followed after him obediently.

Click. Thud.

The basement door was gently closed, and what remaining light was snatched away as Joseph was completely enveloped by the darkness.

Chapter 389: Maria

Blazing incandescent white lights heated up the Truth Union corridor, even though this place that administered all the top scholars and their knowledge still had a cold, unfeeling aura.

The sides of these corridors were transparent glass. When looking down, one could clearly see mechanical arms and various instruments at work as well as researchers in exoskeleton suits busy going about their business.

And standing above and watching this familiar yet somewhat unfamiliar Truth Union was the woman who stood at the top of all current knowledge—Truth Union Chairman, Maria.

During her ‘seclusion,’ Andrew had indeed done quite a lot of things. Had she come out later, perhaps the Truth Union might have even undergone a change of name.

After all, no ordinary person would dare to blow up the underground passageway to the Lower District that had been overseen by the Truth Union for over a thousand years.

Andrew... was never this daring in the past.

Maria pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose as a dark glint flashed across her sky-blue eyes.

“Chairman Maria,” her assistant shouted from behind her. “The Vice-Chairman, heads of departments, project heads, and project team leaders have all gathered in the main conference room.”

Maria nodded somewhat pensively. “Got it.”

She silently watched the perfectly organized scene beneath her, then turned around and strode toward the conference room, the sleeves of her spotless white coat and long black hair fluttering in her wake.

Andrew sat in the secondary seat of the conference room, looking exceptionally calm.

It was somewhat surprising that Maria could advance to Supreme-rank and survive the explosion. At that time, Raziel already anticipated her return, and that explosion was a gift prepared for her. Given her strength, he shouldn't have overlooked it.

The Andrew of the past might have started to hesitate and become flustered under these circumstances.

After all, Andrew had always been smothered by this ruthless genius.

But now, with the backing of that omnipotent god, as well as the great founder of the Truth Union who was once called 'Ethereal Wisdom,' he didn't feel the slightest bit afraid.

Andrew sneered inwardly. *You lived. Being alive is good as well...*

A precursor whose fate was unknown, or a leader whose position was under threat. Of the two, Andrew was inclined to prefer the latter.

If Maria hadn't reemerged, she would forever be that precursor whose fate was unknown. The only great scholar of the Third Era that had attacked a Supreme-rank. But now, that might not be the case...

The only thing noteworthy was the stuff that Maria had found... Was it notes from the Lower District?

An insidious glint flicked across Andrew's eyes. Perhaps he ought to report this matter to Boss Lin. He recalled that Boss Lin had always been interested in the Lower District.

While he was thinking about all this, the sight of Maria entering the conference room caught everyone's attention.

"It's delightful seeing everyone again," Maria said as she adjusted her glasses. The lenses reflecting incandescent light made it impossible to see her expression.

Maria received quite the rapturous response from others in the room, though Andrew only raised an eyebrow but didn't say anything.

"My long seclusion was somewhat special, and I'm sorry to have kept it from everyone as the method used was a little peculiar and I had no choice but to head into the Lower District. But it's over now. Hence, I can officially announce that I've already advanced to Supreme-rank," said Maria calmly.

An uproar immediately erupted in the conference room.

"That's great! This is massive news for our Truth Union!"

Excitement and fervent reverence filled the faces of the scholars in the room. "Our Truth Union has finally produced another Supreme-rank member after Sir Ymir in over a thousand years!

"No, not that it's been confirmed that Sir Ymir isn't dead; with our two Supreme-ranks, the Truth Union has completely surpassed Secret Rite Tower. Th-this is an opportunity for the Truth Union!"

Sounds of congratulations filled the entire conference room. Had it not been for the usual calm, rational temperament of scholars as well as the fact that their superiors were present, they might have already started cheering.

Andrew gave a presentable and formal smile as he surveyed the entire room.

It appeared that Maria was still quite extraordinary. She was born with immense talent into a reputable family. This was a genius that people sang praises about since she was a little girl all the way till present day where she was the extraordinary leader of the Truth Union.

Not to mention that there were only a handful of Supreme-ranks in this world. Most people couldn't even imagine what sort of existence Supreme-ranks were—an unfathomable existence that could shift natural laws and become the master of a certain domain.

However, there was a brainless Supreme-rank existence by

Andrew's side who was completely at his mercy. There was also the only true god, Boss Lin, so Maria's achievement of Supreme-rank wasn't much of a blow to Andrew, who merely leaned back slightly in his chair and watched on indifferently.

In fact, Andrew doubted if Maria had truly mastered domain or Law. Without these, a so-called Supreme-rank was just lip service.

Andrew's gaze was full of scrutiny without the slightest hint of fear.

"Somaya," Maria suddenly called out. A female scholar seated to the left of the round table stood up. Maria looked at her and ordered, "Start reporting on all that was done here during my absence."

"Yes." Secretary Somaya took out a thick stack of papers and got ready to start.

"No need to go through that much trouble." Smiling, Maria raised a hand to interrupt. "Everyone's time is precious. Just explain it as briefly as possible and send the written report to my office later."

"Yes, yes, ma'am." Somaya tensed up, immediately putting away the papers, and cleared her throat. Then she began her report.

Maria leaned back in her seat, scanning the actions and expressions of all her fellow scholars while, at the same time, listening to Somaya's report on the various Truth Union undertakings during this period. On top of that, she would point out any mistakes or shortcomings in the report.

It was impossible to tell if she was observing her subordinates or contemplating about the contents of the report.

It was a level well to be expected of one that had achieved Supreme-rank. This stifling feeling was completely different from before... All of the scholars within the conference had the very same thought in their minds.

"...And, in the case of the Magic Ovum Mirror," Somaya adjusted her glasses before she went on, "it was the first time the bookstore owner showed initiative in displaying Supreme-rank strength,

because...”

She hesitated for a moment.

Maria, who had been silent for some time, suddenly looked up.
“Because of?”

Somaya glanced apprehensively at the Vice-Chairman seated at the side. “Uh, because of Vice-Chairman Andrew’s mistake, which led to the Truth Union and the bookstore being on opposing sides.”

“Ahem,” Andrew rapped his fingers on the table, interrupting before Maria could reprimand him. “But later on, I investigated and found that it was a mole within the Truth Union that caused this trouble. Moreover, I’ve already gotten the bookstore owner’s forgiveness.”

“A mole?” Maria frowned.

“The Path of Flaming Sword planted a spy within the Truth Union in a bid to control us. But fortunately, Vice-Chairman Andrew’s foresight helped avert this,” Somaya quickly added.

“No.” Andrew raised his hand and smiled modestly. “It was all thanks to Sir Ymir.” He met Maria’s eyes and specially dragged out his enunciation of ‘Ymir.’

“Heh,” Maria, who was still looking Andrew straight in the eye, chuckled. Yet, it was impossible to tell whether she was happy or angry. “I see...”

Andrew didn’t back down and kept his gaze firm as if he was indeed just stating the truth.

Maria smiled insincerely. “Although this is all thanks to Sir Ymir, Vice-Chairman Andrew definitely played a big part in having the Truth Union thrive in my absence.”

“You flatter me.” Andrew was well-versed in the hypocrisy of nobles. He maintained an appropriate smile, his playboy demeanor still shining through even though he had aged. “I’m only the Vice-Chairman after all. It was Chairman Maria who instructed me before she went into seclusion, so I naturally had to do my best.”

Maria didn't get baited in; instead, she turned back to Somaya. "Continue. Tell me more about the bookstore owner."

"Yes." Somaya nodded and briefed Maria on everything that was known about Lin Jie till now.

Maria tilted her head and listened, eyes narrowed.

Everything that happened during this period of time, all the conflicts and disputes that—though existed for some time already—had become intertwined as if sucked into a vortex. One by one, every piece and every organization was dancing like marionettes under that party's will.

The Truth Union had unknowingly become a tool in that being's hands.

And now, the scholars present were even proud that they could be of help to Lin Jie.

Something wasn't right. It was definitely very wrong.

And how that party had influenced the Truth Union was through Andrew... and Ymir, who had suddenly come back to life.

Somaya's report came to an end as Maria pondered.

"...This is everything that has happened since you went into seclusion, and here's the written report."

Somaya placed a stack of paper in front of Maria and withdrew.

Maria nodded in silence, her fingers tapping the table as she looked at the manuscript.

The scholars present were also silent as they waited for the Chairman's speech, and the atmosphere mellowed.

After some time, Maria looked up and suddenly said in a relaxed manner, "The Truth Union having two Supreme-ranks now is worth celebrating. But, upon consideration of Sir Ymir's lofty status, it wouldn't be good for me to remain as Chairman. How about—

“I give up my position?”

Maria revealed a slight smile. It sounded as if she was discussing a small matter like improving the quality of food at the Truth Union’s canteens. The entire conference room went deathly silent as all the parties present were stunned.

Andrew sucked in a deep breath. He hadn’t expected Maria to make such a move.

What exactly... does she want to do? It can't be that she's oblivious that the position of Chairman is her greatest insurance policy other than her own strength?

As long as she stepped down from her position, Andrew was confident that he could make her disappear within three days. What exactly gave her the courage to abdicate?

“What do you think, Vice-Chairman Andrew?” asked Maria.

Andrew was silent for a bit before he replied, “This is a rather serious matter. One that we can’t decide this casually...”

Maria looked him in the eye, then at everyone else, and proclaimed loudly, “Why aren’t you all saying anything? Then, I’ll give you all time. Three months from now, we’ll vote to decide who the Chairman will be.”

Chapter 390: Family

It could be said that the outcome of this meeting was an ‘unhappy resolution.’

All the scholars at this meeting could feel the sudden change in the atmosphere, akin to an impending storm.

No one had dared express their opinions on Maria’s provocative proposal, so Maria had just come to a decision on this matter. The other reports by scholars in this meeting were done in trepidation and everyone left in a hurry after it ended, afraid to be sandwiched between the wrath of two Supreme-ranks.

Maria returned to her office that had been empty for a long time.

The quiet office was exactly how she left it, but there wasn’t a single speck of dust, so someone must have cleaned it regularly. Maria looked around and didn’t sense any lingering traces of aether either.

Naturally, Maria wouldn’t leave any confidential material in an obvious place like her office, but it didn’t mean that there wouldn’t be fools trying to sneak in.

Seated in her chair, Maria reminisced the days where this place was practically covered in dust. She picked up and flipped open Somaya’s long and comprehensive report, skimming through the information about the bookstore owner over and over while rapidly connecting the dots.

Knock knock.

The expected knock on the door didn’t interrupt her train of thought.

“Come in,” Maria said, looking at the person who entered. Then she shut the report and adjusted her glasses, revealing a relaxed smile. “I was wondering who it might be... My dear little nephew, it’s

been a while.”

The young man who walked was Maria’s only nephew—Hood. Everyone in the Truth Union knew that he was a privileged second-generation who used his connections to do whatever he wanted.

Maria got up and hugged Hood affectionately as he approached.

It was obvious how much she doted on Hood by the way she treated Hood given her status and the fact that she had now advanced to Supreme-rank.

Hood returned the warm hug and said excitedly, “Aunt Maria, welcome back!”

Maria reached out and rubbed his head. “Did you study hard while I was gone?” she asked gently.

“Mmm.” Hood raised his head confidently and chuckled. But his face then turned serious. “You underestimate me, Aunt. I’m very different from before.”

“Is that so?” Maria revealed a rare warm smile. “I’ve heard that you’ve lots of insights on many issues within the Union and have gained the approval of many fellow scholars. And also that you have a group of good companions?”

“Of course!” Hood lifted his chin and said with certainty. “We’re all like-minded comrades!”

“Like-minded comrades...” Maria’s heart fell as an ominous feeling came over her. However, she kept on smiling. “What sort of like-mindedness? Why don’t you tell Aunt all about it?”

“Of course! That’s what I came to talk with you about, Aunt Maria.”

Hood had said this rather casually. Then his warm gaze slowly became strangely fanatical as he uttered in a low voice as if reciting a prayer, “We will always believe in the omniscience and omnipotence of the bookstore owner—Mr. Lin.”

The smile froze on Maria’s face. She stopped midway in the motion

of pushing her glasses up as if she had turned into a statue.

She stared at the close family member before her, but he had an expression that was totally unfamiliar, causing a chill to run up her spine.

Maria was silent for a moment, then she sucked in a deep breath. When her hand was finally lowered, the expression on her face was dead serious.

This was a look that had always frightened Hood since he was young.

Maria always had this same expression whenever he got into trouble.

“I think you... haven’t grown up yet,” Maria uttered. “There were outsiders just now with eyes and ears among them, so it wasn’t convenient for me to say it. Now that it’s only you and me, my nephew, I think it’s necessary to make things clear.

“That Lin Jie... can’t be trusted...”

“Nonsense!!!” Hood erupted with rage and slammed his palm on Maria’s desk. He spread his hands wide, eyes filled with rabid fanaticism as he said through gritted teeth, “Boss Lin is our one and only—”

Midway through his sentence, Hood saw the look on Maria’s face and suddenly realized how outrageous his actions were.

His rationality prevailed, telling him that the person before him was the elder he most respected and loved.

“Sorry. Sorry, Aunt.”

It was as if he had become a totally different person. He withdrew his hands and stood there at a loss.

Maria got up and patted her nephew on the shoulder. “It’s alright. Calm down, Hood, I can see it. You’re just being controlled by that Boss Lin. As long—”

Hood's guilty expression instantly turned feral the moment she said that, as if something within him had been triggered. He slapped Maria's hand aside and sneered, "You don't understand at all! Ignorant fool! Boss Lin is here to save us all! He gave us a new life! Without him, we would never escape the mire of 'truth' nor understand that one's own wisdom is true power!"

Maria's wrist hurt from Hood's slap. Hearing all this, her expression turned especially austere as the faint pressurizing aura of a Supreme-rank started to fill the room.

Hood had grown up adoring and being terrified of his Aunt Maria. That stern look of hers often came with a storm of criticism that practically made him reflexive.

He had just retorted when Maria's gaze frightened him once again. He quickly backed away and subconsciously hung his head. "I'm sorry, Aunt. I'm sorry. I mean... I mean, you shouldn't have said that... His greatness can't be doubted."

At the same time, his face subconsciously turned malevolent once more. His brows especially were tightly furrowed and squirming as if something was about to burst out from beneath the skin.

Seeing the pained expression of Hood stunned Maria as she suddenly recalled the people she had seen in the Lower District—if those things could still be called human...

Based on her investigation results and what she had seen and heard in the past few months, all of them were in a similar situation as Hood was now. First, their brains began to mutate, completely changing their cognition and rationale. Then, even their bodies would unknowingly become nutrients for the darkness. And eventually their bodies and minds started changing, so they were no longer themselves but a part of the darkness.

Maria slowly turned away. She didn't want to look at Hood's unsightly state that even she was unable to control. "Look at you, Hood," she said grimly. "If that's how you grew up, I'd rather you stayed in the past."

“I must tell you this. Lin Jie, this Boss Lin you keep going about, is just a liar. He isn’t a god!”

Hood’s head buzzed.

Disrespect... Disrespectful... How can you be so disrespectful to a god?!

Hood’s third eye on his glabella snapped open as he suddenly drew a dagger from his sleeve and charged toward Maria.

Maria took a deep breath. Without even turning back, she invoked her Supreme-rank power.

Hood was instantly within her control. However, Maria was still a tad slow. The dagger thrust forward without any hesitation and sliced off several strands of her long black hair.

Had Maria not dodged, her physical body, the weakest part of a Supreme-rank scholar, would have been seriously injured.

The sadness and anger that had briefly existed in Maria’s eyes disappeared. When she saw that Hood was still trying to charge her with that sinister glint in his eyes, she sighed and raised her hand for a gentle swipe.

Hood screamed and fell to the ground, blood spurting out everywhere. Maria had cut off one of his arms.

All of this happened in a short space of time. It was as if some thin-skinned tubed had been torn open completely and many squirming tentacles extended out from the smooth cut. It appeared that Hood’s body seemed to have become the nest of some soft-bodied creature.

What... What is this?! Images of some things she had seen in the Lower District came flooding back.

Seeing these things made her actually feel like throwing up for the first time in a very long while.

This was the first time she felt this way since becoming a Supreme-rank.

Hood wailed in pain on the ground. Maria had a look of pity, but the situation made her actually feel helpless.

“I won’t give up on you, Hood. Aunt will treat you,” muttered Maria as she pulled out a tube of clear fluid medication from within her pocket and swiftly plunged it into Hood’s neck.

Like a sedated beast, Hood slowly calmed down and lost consciousness. However, that arm seemed to have a mind of its own as the tentacled appendage continued to thrash about. Hood’s third eye didn’t close either as it kept staring intently at Maria.

Maria surveyed the mess in her office and clenched her fist tightly. “Bookstore owner, I will uncover who you really are...”

Knock knock.

Yet another series of knocking interrupted Maria’s thoughts. Before Maria said to come on, the person on the other end had unceremoniously pushed the door open.

The door was pulled open a crack, and Maria saw that familiar and disgusting face peek in.

“This doesn’t look good, esteemed Chairman Maria,” Andrew said warmly. “Would you like me to help?”

Maria set aside the false facade she had used early and demanded, “Was it you that put my nephew in contact with that bookstore owner?”

“No, no, no. You’ve wronged me.” Andrew said with a smile as he let himself into the brightly-lit office. “Hood came into contact with Boss Lin himself—all this before I was forgiven—and then he was chosen. This is something you ought to be proud and happy about.”

Maria’s eyes narrowed. She was livid but still stood firmly in place and exerted her Supreme-rank pressure on Andrew.

Andrew’s body started trembling. He gritted his teeth and forced a smile. “So what if you’re already a Supreme-rank? You’re merely a slightly bigger ant to Boss Lin. My advice for you is to give up. You

can never defeat us, because he wants us to win.”

Maria stuffed her hands into the lab coat pockets and walked over to her desk while scoffing, “Is that so?”

Then she casually took out a tattered notebook from the drawer and waved it in front of Andrew, revealing a provocative gaze underneath the reflection of her glasses.

“You seem fearless, but I heard that the bookstore owner protected a smuggler for a similar notebook some time ago. I believe that he must be rather interested in this. Say, do you think he will support you or me when the time comes?”

Chapter 391: Periodic Subsidence

Maria still had a calm arrogance as if she didn't feel like she was in a disadvantaged position at all.

Andrew's current strength was still far from Supreme-rank. In the face of Maria's pressure, every inch of his body screamed danger. However, he still met Maria's sky-blue eyes without a trace of fear and even suddenly chuckled.

"Ha-ha-ha-ha..."

Maria's face turned cold. She kept her silence with a straight face as if she couldn't understand why Andrew was laughing.

"Huh, why so nervous, Chairman Maria?" Andrew spread his hands apart while maintaining his smile. "If the notebook you possess is what Boss Lin wants, and he wishes to support you as a reward for getting it, then I would naturally have no complaints.

"After all, your talents and gift for Boss Lin are things that I can't do." Andrew bowed to Maria formally with the etiquette of a noble. "If Boss Lin is happy and feels that you deserve it, you will undoubtedly be the Truth Union's Chairman, and I'll be your pawn."

Maria sneered, "So, your idea is that the legitimate Truth Union Chairman is the one who obtains the approval of the bookstore owner? On what grounds! You guys have been completely brainwashed by that guy indeed..."

Andrew's smile became strangely fanatical. "On what grounds? On the grounds that the lord's greatness is incomparable."

"Insane lunatic," muttered Maria, giving her assessment.

Andrew seemed rather pleased with Maria's judgment and didn't

refute, even nodding his head in agreement. “But unfortunately...”

“What’s unfortunate?” inquired Maria. She knew that Andrew couldn’t be reasoned with. She had to see how much he was willing to say in order to get more information.

“Unfortunately, you don’t believe in Mr. Lin at all...” uttered Andrew. “You don’t even want to use this notebook to ask for anything, nor expect to get benefits from Mr. Lin. Rather, you have another motive.

“But Boss Lin is a great and benevolent existence. As long as you pray to him, you will receive a response and obtain strength, even if one’s a faithless person like you,” Andrew said. “So, it’s just too unfair.”

“Don’t you think that to make it fairer... I should be the one to bring Boss Lin this offering?”

Andrew put his hand to his chest. “Please hand this notebook over to me.”

Just as I thought...

Maria surmised as she stared at Andrew without a shred of emotion. The Supreme-rank gaze made Andrew’s hairs stand on end, but he stood his ground.

After what seemed like an eternity, Maria muttered, “Dream on.”

Andrew’s eyes narrowed. “Since you know Boss Lin wishes to study this notebook, aren’t you afraid that I’ll kill you and snatch it away?”

Of course, it won’t be me doing so but Raziel.

“Ha.” Maria’ stared straight into Andrew’s cold eyes and sneered. “You can try. Didn’t Raziel already give it a try? If he had succeeded, I wouldn’t have come back from the Lower District.”

Andrew remained silent for a bit. Though he had already gained power from the bookstore owner, dealing with this woman was still

a little too difficult.

However, Andrew was now certain that even though Maria had reached Supreme-rank, she hadn't yet mastered the nature-defying domain like Wilde and Joseph had.

Otherwise, she wouldn't just be countering with only words against such a close-range provocation.

"Esteemed Chairman Maria, I don't know what you are talking about. The collapse of Machine Loop was just an accident." Andrew forced a smile. While he wasn't sure what made Maria this fearless, he couldn't reveal anything about the device in Machine Loop.

"Since you said that we'll vote in three months, let's wait peacefully till then." Having said that, Andrew picked up Hood from the ground.

Hood was knocked out cold, but his right arm was still a bunch of squirming tentacles. They were like soft creatures without any of the five senses hiding within Hood that now had control of his body.

"Enough, Hood." Andrew gently patted the agitated tentacles. They seemed to gradually quieten down before regenerating into a new arm. Other than his torn clothing, Hood's arm didn't seem to have been broken before.

Maria watched silently as Andrew dealt with her 'nephew.' She could only clench her fist and say nothing. As much as she wanted to seize her only family back, she was more afraid that Hood would just be another stranger when he woke up.

"Seeya, Chairman Maria."

Andrew took Hood and left the office.

Maria heaved a sigh of relief when she could no longer sense his aura. She eyed the blood on the ground and saw that it was gradually evaporating into nothingness, as if it had been some sort of invisible creature that had left the office... Maria relaxed slightly and sat back down.

After resting in her chair for a while, Maria raised her hand, and a reflective ring-shaped object appeared in her palm. Many runes were faintly discernible on the surface and in the hollow center floated a broken stone fragment.

Maria revealed a look of reverence as she gazed at it. The stone fragment glowed with a dark red light and had many strange symbols engraved on it. However, because there was a lot missing, these symbols couldn't be interpreted. Nevertheless, just by looking at it, one could feel a tingle as if they were standing before a warm bonfire while surrounded by darkness.

She kept aside her palm and leaned back, closing her eyes. Memories of the Lower District came flooding back. The feeling of being on the verge of a mental breakdown every single day during that period of time was vivid in her mind.

If not for this keepsake of a Primordial Witch, Maria would have lost her life in the Lower District a long time ago.

The explosion which Raziel set up had also nearly taken Maria's life too. No, it could even be said that she had already died once, but it was this object that had resurrected her...

Presumably, regardless of how powerful that bookstore owner was, there was no way he could compare with the power of a Primordial Witch.

Maria, who was resting with her eyes closed, suddenly snapped open those sky-blue eyes of hers and took a deep long breath. Whether it was for the Truth Union or Hood, she had to visit that bookstore.

Lin Jie sat lazily on the newly bought sofa in the bookstore, watching the fuzzy display on his television.

After the last heavy snowfall in Norzin, the weather gradually warmed up, leading to a couple of rainy days which probably messed up the signal and resulted in the fuzzy display on the old television set that Lin Jie had been using to kill time with.

Lin Jie stood up with the remote control and hit the back of the television set several times. The fuzzy lines cleared up, and the anchor on the news broadcast could finally finish a complete sentence—

“According to reports, a large-scale collapse occurred in the internal laboratories of the Truth Union, a well-known academic organization situated in the Central District. It is unclear of the extent of damage and number of casualties as of now. Experts say this was caused by periodic subsidence...”

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow as he heard the reporter's analysis. *Periodic subsidence, what the heck... The geological conditions of Azir are getting more and more ridiculous by the day.*

Initially, Lin Jie had assumed blizzards and earthquakes were already the extremes. He never imagined that there would actually be such a term as periodic subsidence.

Oh well, it's a completely man-made city, after all. Problems with the foundations aren't out of the ordinary. Moreover, since the Lower District is underground, the earth must have been hollowed out, so a collapse seems plausible.

Lin Jie used logical thinking to force himself to believe this.

But the Truth Union was directly affected this time round... I wonder if Andrew, Hood, and Prima are alright?

At the thought of this, Lin Jie felt that he had to offer solace to these three regular customers and thus took out his communications device. However, before he even made a call, he heard the report from the television continue, “Presently, the Truth Union isn't accepting interviews and their communication lines are temporarily disconnected...”

After pondering for a bit, Boss Lin decided to call Ji Zhixiu. She, too, lived in the Central District, so Miss Ji should have a better understanding of the situation. Moreover, there was one other thing to discuss, so Lin Jie had a reason to make the call.

The communications device rang only once before the call was answered respectfully by Ji Zhixiu. “Boss Lin, what can I do for you?”

Chapter 392: Opening A Branch

Ji Zhixiu's voice over the communications device was slightly distorted, but the respect in her tone was evident as ever.

From the way she had immediately picked up Lin Jie's call, it was clear that she didn't dare be negligent.

Ah, do it for me... Regardless of whether it was previously or now, Lin Jie felt that Ji Zhixiu was being overly respectful toward him. How that could be explained by his previous actions which had made the young Miss Ji somewhat dependent on him.

However, now with all signed a contract to be partners, there shouldn't be any need to be accommodating to this extent, right? During our negotiations, Ji Bonong didn't even seem to have any reservations and gave in right away...

Lin Jie was somewhat baffled, but the benefits he got were real and true.

Lin Jie did have some guesses when he recalled how Ji Zhixiu hadn't shown much emotion at the Fred Family's undoing at the banquet. However, since Ji Zhixiu didn't say anything, he would just maintain a tacit understanding.

"Nothing much." Lin Jie chuckled. "I just saw on TV that Area A where you guys are at... and the Truth Union's periodic subsidence... I was just wondering if you guys were affected?"

He felt like laughing no matter how many times he read the professional term, 'periodic subsidence.'

Is this really not a term used by experts to fool common folk? The Truth Union wouldn't be experimenting on some secret weapon, would they...?

Ji Zhixiu could hear the humor in Lin Jie's words and told herself that Boss Lin probably felt terms like 'Secret Rite Tower' and 'Truth Union' were being ridiculous... To think they could come up with a

term like ‘periodic subsidence.’

Speaking of which, since he was asking about the situation, and the Truth Union was—or used to be—the greatest auxiliary of the central administration, Boss Lin was probably worried about whether there would be any danger after Rolle Resource officially fell out with the central administration.

Ji Zhixiu replied softly, “Thank you for your concern. For the time being, we’re safe and there isn’t much danger. The only problem is that we’re a little understaffed. However, I’ve already made contact with the Truth Union and I believe the matter will be resolved soon.”

...Her upcoming plan to ‘become a race’ required large quantities of ‘people.’ And the Truth Union’s homunculus project was key.

“That’s good.” Lin Jie touched his chin. *Understaffed? And she’s contacted the Truth Union. Could it really be a geological problem that required professional academics to discuss and solve?*

“The Truth Union is professional enough. I still believe in... their skills.”

After all, they even had prosthetics and limb regeneration technology. Even if the Truth Union’s studies were somewhat skewed, they were definitely at the forefront of Norzin. It would truly be troublesome if they couldn’t do anything.

“Having your trust is more than enough,” said Ji Zhixiu with a bright smile on her face. “By the way, Boss Lin, the mansion I’ve prepared for you previously can be transferred to your name at any time.”

Lin Jie was surprised. “I didn’t expect you to still keep it.”

“Of course, I wouldn’t dare disobey Boss Lin’s instructions,” said Ji Zhixiu sincerely.

“Oh... That’s fine. I previously had the thought of opening a branch in the Central District and let Mu’en run it. In the three days I was away, Mu’en managed the bookstore very well on her own. I think

she's capable enough to take charge."

That's right. The reason he left the bookstore for three days was to test Mu'en's ability.

But, of course, his main reason was to freeload...

Ji Zhixiu's heart skipped a beat. Did Boss Lin mean to enter the Central District?!

Because of their 'uprising,' the Central District would definitely fall into chaos. Having an assistant who was simultaneously related to the Truth Union and Sun's Faith open a branch there meant...

Ji Zhixiu sucked in a deep breath and said, "I'll transfer ownership of the Fred Family's mansion to you immediately. As long as you need it, you can get anyone to take over it at any time."

"Alright, thank you, Miss Ji."

"It's my honor to provide you with even the tiniest bit of help."

Lin Jie hung up the communications device and was in a good mood. How could he not be happy?

This was a gold-tier villa in the Central District for free!

With some renovations, this would be a courtyard house in the capital. He would make a killing!

Lin Jie stood up with his hands to his back and leisurely went looking for Mu'en, the latter making milk tea next door.

The girl was expressionless as usual, her inky black eyes like bottomless pools of water. Her skin was fair, and beneath the warm light of the book cafe, faint hairs on her body were slightly discernible. She mixed the milk and tea bag together and closed the lid. Then, she raised the shaker and shook hard, forming a beautiful arc with her arm.

Her movements were practiced and her attitude serious.

"Ahem," Lin Jie cleared his throat, attracting Mu'en's attention, and she tilted her head over immediately.

"Boss... Do you have any orders?"

The ice cold girl's expression suddenly became lively. She hurriedly put down whatever she was doing and stood there obediently like a primary school student standing at attention.

Orders here, order there...

Lin Jie wondered whether the image of himself in this young girl's heart was too loftily set.

Lin Jie sized up Mu'en.

"You've been at the bookstore for quite a few months already. From my observations, I think you're completely qualified to head a shop," said Lin Jie. "I've decided to open a branch in the Central District and you can run it."

Mu'en's pupils constricted slightly before returning to normal and frowned. "Boss Lin wants to open a branch?"

"That's right." Lin Jie nodded. "I've more or less been discussing it with Miss Ji from Rolle Resource. I've gotten a villa in the Central District, so it's rather favorable to establish a branch."

"Central District..." Mu'en became pensive.

"That's right. If it's the Central District, there's money... Ah, no, I mean, there would be many more people who like to read, right?" Lin Jie said matter-of-factly.

Mu'en blinked several times. *More... people who liked to read?*

Do these so-called people who like to read mean believers?!

In other words, he wanted to recruit more believers in the Central District. Was it a clear statement that he wished to engage in direct confrontation with the central administration that governed Norzin to fight for the right to rule?!

In just a few seconds, it was as if a storm swept over Mu'en's mind and washed it clean.

"I understand what you mean." Mu'en nodded, a determined look in her eyes. Her tiny fists were clenched as if ready to go on a great undertaking.

Lin Jie: "..."

He began to wonder if it was a little inhumane to let such a cute and innocent kid work as a capitalist this early in her life.

"Of course, if you think it's too much, you can continue to stay here and gain more experience for a while more," Lin Jie said hesitantly.

Mu'en shook her head. "No, Boss has already taught me a lot. It is time I start imparting your will."

Lin Jie had a strange look on his face. Mu'en was a cold beauty to begin with, and it could be said that she was rather lacking in emotion. But at this moment, she seemed especially impassioned.

Did he raise this child in a way that led her astray?

"...It's good if you can understand. Work hard and keep up your current standards. You can manage a shop very well." Lin Jie reached out and rubbed Mu'en's head.

Never-mind, as long as the kid is happy.

"Mm, mm." Mu'en nodded vigorously like a little chick pecking away at rice grains on the ground.

With that out of the way, Lin Jie returned to his shabby bookstore and continued his usual daily activity—reading.

Mu'en propped her elbows on the counter and rested her chin between her hands, quietly watching Lin Jie reading through the heavy glass door. Then, she closed her eyes and entered Walpurgis' dream realm.

Chapter 393: Reach A

Consensus

Mu'en shut her eyes, and when she opened them again, a familiar scene of a vast and calm water surface appeared before her. Compared to before, Mu'en could now enter this dream realm at will.

Ripples spread out under her feet as she threaded lightly on the surface. With her as the center, these ripples expanded continuously, finally disappearing at the point where sky and water met.

At this moment, it seemed like Mu'en was traversing the night sky.

She raised her hand slowly, and an annulus appeared in front of her. "Eternal Sun, Vincent, follow the path of this dream realm and come to me."

Mu'en's voice echoed in the dream, ethereal and strangely pleasant.

As soon as she said that, this dream realm that was like the night sky began to slowly heat up. The calm mirror-like water surface beneath Mu'en's feet started to crumble, gradually wrinkling the night sky and causing the stars reflected on the water's surface to shatter.

In the distant place where water met sky, an incomparably blistering ball of fire slowly rose like the sun. Mu'en eyed the ball of fire indifferently, unable to feel its heat as if it was being swallowed by the formless night sky.

Inside Walpurgis' dream realm, even the harsh sun was as docile as a young child.

"Master of the Night, Eternal Moonlight, Lady Mu'en—Vincent has heard your beckon and come."

The giant blazing ball of fire let out a voice that didn't sound human, but its tone was gentle and steady.

Mu'en's fair and cold face was dyed a faint reddish-gold by the giant ball of fire. This was a massive ball of fire with an ugly black spot on its mottled dark orange surface and a huge pillar of fire spun at its edge.

This huge sunspot moved gradually, sometimes becoming larger while other times shrinking till it was nearly gone.

Around this sun-like ball of fire were thousands of small fireballs, each several dozen meters wide, forming an imposing and jaw-dropping image.

In comparison, Mu'en's figure was so minute it was almost insignificant.

"Pope Vincent, I have come to tell you something," Mu'en looked at the bright sun and said solemnly. "Boss Lin has assigned a new mission."

The massive ball of flame trembled slightly when Boss Lin's name was said. Then the thousands of fireballs around it descended simultaneously as if they were bowing and listening.

Mu'en continued, "Boss Lin wishes to open a branch in the Central District with me managing it. This is to increase the number of believers and officially enter the Central District to announce his arrival to the true upper-class rulers of Norzin."

Vincent listened to Mu'en's message. Upon hearing about the intent to open a branch, his body suddenly shuddered.

"Finally... it's about time."

Opening a branch meant delegating power. Mu'en would be able to make her own decisions on certain things, and it also implied that the Sun's Faith would have more freedom to do more things without having to be afraid.

After a brief pause, Vincent bemoaned, "The Sun's Faith hasn't done

well enough. If I had worked harder, Boss Lin wouldn't have to worry about the matter of believers."

"No, the Sun's Faith has only just been established and you've already worked hard, not to mention that you've done very well." Mu'en offered her solace, then frowned and tilted her head as if in thought. "There's more than enough followers that have appeared because of your preaching. The Sun's Faith is now the undisputed number one religion in Norzin. However, Boss Lin wishes to have more followers that like to read..."

Mu'en face lit up. "Or rather... He isn't dissatisfied with the quantity, I think?"

She mulled for a moment before continuing, "Boss Lin told me that some people don't really like books but think that reading can help them find a good path. On the other hand, Boss Lin loves books not for the benefits but because he purely likes to read them.

"He also said, 'books hold a gold house, books hold color like jade.' But to be honest, I still don't really understand this phrase." (T/L Note: Color like jade is a literal translation for 颜如玉, the name of a beauty from Nineteen Old Poems, and basically refers to a young beautiful lady. The entire phrase is a saying from ancient Chinese times which roughly means studying is a path to success that can bring you riches and a beautiful wife.)

Mu'en delved into her memories, recalling all the chicken soup of the soul that Boss Lin had doled out to her previously. She often chatted with Lin Jie, and he was like a father to her, one that guided and protected her.

While she had inherited the power and memories of Walpurgis, becoming the new ruler of the night, her mind was still that of an ordinary homunculus. This was especially evident whenever she listened to Lin Jie's teachings where she could clearly discern between the latter's erudition and her own shallowness. There were always some words and sayings she couldn't understand, and thus only memorized and tried to figure it out.

Vincent silently recited this phrase, and after mulling for a moment,

he said, “Lady Mu’en, I might have some thoughts about these words, but they might sound immature.”

“Go ahead.” Mu’en nodded.

“Boss Lin probably reckons that the current me and other increasing believers aren’t pure enough, nor have morals that are righteous enough. They aren’t true book lovers but rather people who think Boss Lin’s books can benefit them.

“Boss Lin needs people who are pure.”

Mu’en blinked several times.

“Just gaining more believers is something that I can do, but getting believers that are pure is really difficult. Moreover, most just treat Boss Lin’s books as ‘gold houses’ and ‘colors like jade,’ blindly seeking after them and do not truly believe.” Vincent came to such a conclusion after careful consideration.

“Mm... You’re right.” Mu’en nodded pensively.

“If that’s the case, we’ve also found the reason why Boss Lin arranged for Joseph and Wilde to fight,” added Vincent solemnly.

“...Could it be to verify whether Norzin’s transcendent beings have pure and righteous characters?” Mu’en seemed to have been enlightened. “Indeed, Boss’ plans are all far-sighted.”

“Yes, that’s right, but Boss Lin must surely be dissatisfied with the result. Otherwise, he wouldn’t be opening a new branch.”

The blazing ball of fire emitted an intense heat as a high heat and breathed in a low voice. “These mortals have disappointed Boss Lin.”

“Only greed and individual benefits exist in the hearts of these people, some even having the intention of making use of Boss Lin. In their eyes, there’s no difference between good and evil. Such beings have no right to live in this world, so how can they even hope to achieve Boss Lin’s favor?

“I understand what Boss Lin means.”

Vincent’s giant ball of fire blazed even more intensely, illuminating the entire night dream-scape and making it appear as if it was daytime. Rapt fanaticism gradually crept into his voice as he went on, “What the Sun’s Faith needs to do is help share Boss Lin’s burden. Boss Lin doesn’t need people who are impure. It’s time to cleanse this world to achieve this pure goal.”

“Boss Lin will guide Norzin and remove all that is excess. Those that aren’t pure enough should disappear,” Mu’en chimed in indifferently. “A withered tree branch must be cut off or it will absorb nutrients from the main trunk in the future.... Boss Lin needs people who are helpful to him and not this vermin.”

The thousands of fireballs around Vincent rose into the air, vibrating excitedly after having reached a consensus. “And we will become the blade in Boss Lin’s hands.”

Chapter 394: Refugees

Ivan Zachary was an ordinary, quiet working class individual who lived on 67th Avenue in Norzin's Upper District.

Before moving here, he had been living along 23rd Avenue.

His primary job was at an ore processing plant under the Rolle Resource Development Corporation banner, starting work when the sun merely started to rise and only finishing and heading home when the moon hung completely in the quiet night sky.

Because of his poor family background, Zachary had been living like this ever since he graduated from a community education. It was hard, but he could still get by.

However, this peaceful life was turned completely upside down about a few months ago—when the serious gas leak on 23rd Avenue occurred.

When he got home from work, he realized that his house, along with the buildings on surrounding streets, had been completely reduced to dust.

Fortunately, the government in the Central District announced that an assistance grant would be given to those affected, so he could continue to barely make ends meet.

Just that his life had become more difficult.

With this grant, he decided to move to the vicinity of the Church of the Dome near the North of Norzin because he had been posted to a more remote factory. To make it more convenient to travel to work, renting a house near there was the best solution.

Zachary didn't complain. After all, that was all he knew how to do. However, working became even more tiring, and he would only get to see the moon each day.

Having slogged away for a good half of his life, things were getting worse by the day... Such thoughts would occasionally sprout in Zachary's mind, but his habitual satisfaction and drive made it so that he never thought of resisting.

Since young, he had been taught that in life, there was only work and surviving.

However, the sudden changes left Zachary at a loss, and in order to find something to rely on, he began to accept the Church of the Dome's preachings and became a firm believer of the Moon.

On a certain day, when he was praying at night, Zachary had even personally witnessed a legendary Apostle's descent. However, before he could secretly tell other believers about this good news, the Church of the Dome was exposed as a cult the following day.

Another gas explosion also took place in the Church of the Dome branch near his residence...

His faith, and his home... were gone once more.

And this time, no one would compensate him, because Zachary was also considered a member of the cult.

Fortunately, the Central Police Unit said that as long as cult members were willing to turn over a new leaf, nothing would happen to them. Thus, Zachary was filled with hope and waited for the outcome of 'reform through labor.'

He was sent to 67th Avenue, doing his old job once again, but this time, he couldn't even see the moon. He didn't have a home either, just a dirty plank bed.

His time was spent slogging away day and night, and on top of that, he often gambled a large part of his meager earnings at rat-fighting and other forms of entertainment provided by the factory. After paying his monthly taxes to the Central District, he was basically left with no balance.

His salary lasted a mere few days before it was all handed back to the higher-ups and he would be urged to get up and work everyday.

If he wasn't careful, Zachary would just get an earful.

But these 'good days' did not last long.

Two days prior, as Zachary had been about to get up and start working, a massive earthquake caused the factory to collapse. This massive metal factory that was like a monster adept in sucking human blood dry was instantly turned to dust.

However, Ivan Zachary was fortunate enough to avoid death and managed to crawl out from the ruins.

But when he opened his eyes, he saw colleagues all around him had died miserably as well as the superiors who always pushed him around. On top of that, he saw an even more terrifying scene—

It was as if Zachary was witnessing the intersection between dream and reality. A pillar at the edge of the dream had collapsed, and he saw a majestic knight far away turn into a ball of brilliant flame burning to the extremes, like a second sun that had fallen from the sky as it collided with another ball of black matter.

Just the sight of this alone made Zachary feel as if his body were about to explode. His stomach churned as a splitting headache assailed him. Ordinary folk couldn't withstand such pain for more than a few seconds, and thus, Zachary fainted on the spot.

When he opened his eyes once again, he was lying among a heap of corpses.

As he crawled out of this place that was pretty much a mass grave, he tried recalling what he had seen and started doubting the reality of this world.

"What periodic subsidence. It's all a lie..." Ivan Zachary, who had been starving for days, was crouching under a footbridge, complaining to others who had also been displaced by the collapse of 67th Avenue.

The Central District had acted rather indifferently to this disaster, merely taking measures to blockade it but hadn't even mentioned rebuilding. Thus, it was only natural for the fortunate survivors to

be wandering around.

Because he was homeless, Zachary and a few others whom he got along with returned to his old home where he had originally come from, 23rd Avenue.

“It doesn’t matter if that periodic subsidence is true or false... What’s important is whether they will give us aid this time round?” Jack, who was closest to Zachary, was hoping for financial grants.

But in truth, he already knew that the possibility of that happening was rather slim.

Were this a gas explosion, it could still be considered a man-made disaster and the Central District administration might still provide some funding for alleviation. However, the reason given this time was periodic subsidence, which meant a natural-occurring disaster, so those affected could only blame it on their ill fortune.

“This isn’t periodic subsidence at all!” Zachary cried and recalled the last scene he had witnessed before losing consciousness. However, he didn’t dare share it anymore because he wasn’t sure that what he had seen had been real. Clenching his fist tightly, he deliberated for a while before saying, “Have...Have you guys ever seen a god?”

Jack: “...”

The handful of refugees glanced at Zachary sympathetically as if he were a fool. “I heard that you were tricked into believing in the Church of the Dome. Everyone knows that many were brainwashed as well and it isn’t your fault.”

“No, it’s not... Haa.” Zachary tightened his fists, wanting to argue, but decided against it.

He knew that no one would believe what he saw, but the more he described that scene, the more vivid it was in his memory and he became increasingly certain that he hadn’t seen wrongly.

“At this rate, we’ll starve to death. This is at least a definite truth.”

A rumble sounded from a comrade's stomach at this moment, verifying this cold hard truth.

"Forget it." Zachary suddenly stood up from the ground and dusted his pants. "We'll starve to death if we sit here and wait for the aid that's never to come. Being a bad person would at most get you shot dead..."

"It's death either way." A tinge of unwillingness showed in his hungry eyes as he gritted his teeth. "If we die anyway, I'd rather die with a filled belly."

Zachary glanced at the others. "Working honestly would only get you destroyed over and over again... The limits of ordinary people like us are more glaring the harder we work."

"Ivan..." Jack was stunned. "What are you talking about?"

"I can't be a good person anymore, Jack!" Zachary's eyes were resolute as if this was the most determined he had ever been in his life. "Give up. Aid won't come. The central government doesn't give a damn about our lives at all!"

"In any case, everyone's in danger. It's said that Norzin might collapse completely and there are refugees everywhere. Nobody would care one or two more cases that might pop out. All we can do is rely on ourselves..."

His gaze fell on a bookstore across the street. He took a deep breath

"Let's rob that bookstore."

The weather over the past few days had been quite bad, but at least it wasn't raining today...

Still, the sky was overcast and gloomy today, as if something bad was about to happen.

With a book in hand, Lin Jie was seated idly in his bookstore, leisurely reading and pondering.

Lin Jie didn't care whether his bookstore was crowded or not. As long as there were many other customers like Ji Zhixiu who had casually gifted him a villa in the Central District, he wouldn't have to worry about making enough to get by.

What he wanted were high quality customers that could give feedback. With such customers, his business would surely be lucrative.

Of course, ordinary customers still had to be received, such as... the handful of poor-looking customers that had just entered.

Lin Jie glanced up and saw the few shabbily dressed customers that had abruptly entered the bookstore.

"Hi there, would..."

"This is a robbery." Zachary drew a small, polished knife from his breast pocket and aimed the sharp blade at the young owner seated at the counter.

"Ahh?" The smile froze on Lin Jie's face. He didn't understand what was going on.

Besides the rogue pointing a knife at him, two others had climbed over the counter and surrounded Mu'en who had been pouring tea. The hunger and malicious intent in their eyes were clear.

Mu'en glanced up indifferently without even stopping what she had been doing.

The sound of tea being poured was especially shrill in this tense atmosphere.

"D-Didn't you hear? Hand over everything that is valuable!" Zachary tapped his knife on the counter and said as fiercely as he could.

This was his first time being a bad person, so he couldn't help but feel a tad nervous. However, his resolve at being a bad person was firm. No longer would he be diligent and honest; he would do his best at being bad.

Lin Jie's lips twitched. As he watched the robber who seemed even more nervous than himself, the young bookstore owner let out a sigh.

His shabby bookstore was really popular with miscreants.

First, it had been the bunch of brats led by Hood who were out to steal some books, and now, it was a robbery.

However, these bunch of rogues before him weren't stealing books like Hood. Instead, there was a look of real desperation and hunger in their eyes.

Although Norzin had slums, things weren't that bad that people would resort to robbery from starvation.

Lin Jie crossed his arms and rubbed his chin while asking calmly, "Where have you refugees come from?"

"Shut up..."

"Answer Boss Lin's question," a low voice growled. Several refugees felt a sharp pain in their necks as their vision turned dark, nearly causing them to black out.

Lin Jie was stunned for a moment. He turned his head sideways to see that Joseph had already come out of the basement. The old man easily lifted a refugee with one hand and tossed the poor guy aside with a scoff. That massive body and aura was rather imposing.

Mu'en finished pouring the tea and handed the cup to Lin Jie.

Lin Jie accepted it out of habit and then started to wonder how Joseph had managed to recover so quickly from such serious injuries.

Jack held up both hands and gulped. "I'm sorry, very sorry... We, we're..."

He nudged Zachary with his feet, signaling to the latter to run, but Zachary was frozen to the spot, looking as if he had just seen the devil.

“You, you, you...” Zachary’s knife fell to the ground with a clatter. He felt his legs giving way as he landed on his butt, all the while pointing a trembling finger at Joseph.

His eyes were wide open as he clearly recalled the last scene before he had lost consciousness.

Chapter 395: How To Pickle

Joseph's deep blue eyes sized up Ivan Zachary, making certain that he had never seen this shabbily dressed person before.

However, the fear that Zachary exhibited as if he recognized Joseph was clear in Lin Jie's eyes.

Lin Jie blinked several times and couldn't help but find it strange... This robber seemed to know Joseph.

"You, you..."

Zachary scrambled to his feet, then silently shuffled backward.

His eyes widened in shock. The scene that he witnessed before losing consciousness became much more distinct the more he tried to forget it.

And now, he could discern that this robust middle-aged man before him was that divine entity which had transformed into a sun when Zachary had clambered out from the ruins of the factory.

Joseph's eyes narrowed. He, too, was puzzled by this person's reaction, but despite having a hard think, he still wasn't sure if he knew this poor refugee before him.

There were just too many people that he had met and saved.

This moment of hesitation only served to heighten Zachary's fear, causing him to trip and fall backward as he retreated.

"Hey, hey—ah!" Lin Jie subconsciously put his book down and attempted to stand.

Baam!! Crash—

Zachary panicked and slammed into the stack of books that Lin Jie had recently brought out.

Mu'en and Joseph's eyes widened simultaneously.

Zachary subconsciously looked up, only to see the tottering stack of books in his field of view. From his perspective, it was like a magnificent skyscraper crashing down on him. The books emitted a terrifying aura as they came crashing down, as if some sort of demon was hidden within that would break the seal and escape once the books hit the ground.

To Joseph, these books were Boss Lin's knowledge and authority—all these books recorded extraordinary truths, and each one could create a Supreme-rank transcendent being.

Even if Boss Lin didn't care about these, Joseph couldn't let it go. These books mustn't fall to the ground!

Thus, Joseph's pupils constricted as every inch of muscle tensed up. Aether burned all around him, covering every inch of his body. In an instant, even the air around him became scorching and distorted.

Joseph disappeared near instantaneously and appeared beside the tottering stack of books in the next moment, raising a strong arm and stopping the books that had been about to come crashing down.

However, he had overlooked one thing: his injuries had yet to completely recover, and he couldn't yet fully control the power of a Supreme-rank.

Therefore, in his bid to protect this books, he couldn't prevent an aetheric burst leaking out from his body—

Crack!

The moment the toppling books were stopped, the wall behind the nearest bookshelf... cracked.

Cobweb-like fissures appeared on the wall and fine dust rained down.

The few refugees near Joseph felt as if they had been hit in the back of their heads and fainted.

But!

Not a single one of those books had hit the ground! It was a massive success!

Joseph heaved a sigh of relief, wiping beads of sweat from his forehead as he started to tidy up the bookshelf.

Lin Jie: "..."

Boss Lin's butt, which had yet to rise, sat back down. Then, he propped his chin on his hands and mulled.

If he wasn't mistaken, the one that had rushed past him in a flash and caused the wall to crack in the next moment had been Joseph...

No, no, no. There might not have been a causal relation between the two events.

Lin Jie seriously thought about it. After all, there was even a ridiculous geological phenomenon like periodic subsidence in Norzin. Perhaps the ground strata had been unstable in recent times, and a small imperceptible earthquake had occurred, which led to the cracked wall.

He had clearly seen Joseph catching the books before they fell and the latter hadn't touched the counter nor wall at all.

Unless...

As a police officer from a secret department fitted with prosthetic limbs, could Joseph's martial ability have reached beyond the limits of an ordinary person?

This wasn't impossible... In his previous life on Earth, there were martial arts experts that could break marble with their bare hands. In this world where the technology was slightly warped, perhaps such a degree of ability was somewhat normal.

Totally not worth making a fuss about, thought Lin Jie to himself as he nodded.

He covered his mouth and stifled a cough while observing the wall. "Joseph, it seems like you are recovering well from your injuries... That's some quick reaction. Thank you."

"No, no, no. You're too kind, Boss Lin. I just didn't want those precious books of yours to fall on the ground and be dirtied," Joseph said with a bright smile. "It's what I ought to do. If I hadn't done anything, your assistant would have probably done the same."

"Oh... that's true."

Lin Jie glanced at Mu'en, the young lass still as cool as a cucumber, completely unfazed by everything she had witnessed.

Indeed, Mu'en could even take on six people alone, so Joseph's case ought to be rather normal.

Joseph is the head of a special department in the Central Police Unit after all. It isn't too far-fetched to think he possesses some skills. Perhaps he's like one of those special forces soldiers that has trained from young?

But, speaking of which—my wall!!!

Joseph! How are you going to compensate me!!!

Never-mind, never-mind. He's still injured, and it was to protect the books. Moreover, Joseph still has to deal with these refugees.

"Huu..." Lin Jie took a few deep breaths to calm himself down.

Just as he was about to do some asking, he noticed from the corner of his eyes that the one who had pointed a knife at him was the only one amongst this group of refugees that hadn't been knocked out.

"Uh..." Lin Jie propped himself against the counter and eyed the refugee that had fallen to the ground in fear.

Joseph turned around and was surprised too. This person wasn't a transcendent being, but he could still maintain his composure in the face of the pressurizing aura of a Supreme-rank.

Zachary hadn't fainted amid the surging aether blow. Instead, he sat on the ground with lifeless eyes and a blank expression, replaying the scene in his mind that he had witnessed after crawling out of the factory ruins.

He was now certain that Joseph had been the last thing he saw before losing consciousness. The knight that had turned into flames.

I-I wouldn't be silenced, would I?!

Zachary gulped nervously, recalling that the Central District government had chosen to keep this matter a secret. And he'd inadvertently seen it—

The more one knew, the quicker the death.

Fear completely gripped Zachary's heart. But right now, he wasn't alone. He needed to think about the lives of his comrades too...

"Are you alright?" Lin Jie asked Zachary.

"I-I'm fine." Zachary carefully got up from the ground and forced a smile. But in truth, his legs were already weak from fright.

"Your companions... why did they all faint, huh?" Lin Jie frowned as he eyed the bunch of refugees sprawled on the ground.

It couldn't be because of Joseph, could it? He didn't even touch these people.

Zachary's mouth twitched. *Wasn't this your doing?!*

It was you who instigated this burly man to do so, right?! What's up with you asking me this question with an innocent look on your face?!

Are you even human?

He could clearly sense that the aura emitted in this instant was exactly the same one he felt when he was unconscious.

"They probably... fainted from hunger?"

Zachary actually managed a smile. Since the other party asked such a thing, he probably wanted to pretend that he didn't know anything.

I can't say. I definitely can't say that I've seen that guy... I'll be silenced otherwise.

"Huh?" was Lin Jie's reaction.

"B-Boss... To be honest, we haven't eaten for a few days," Zachary said with a trembling voice. "We were originally working as laborers at 67th Avenue, but the periodic subsidence caused the ground layer to collapse, leaving us homeless. That was why we thought about robbing your bookstore. We were really desperate.

"I-I'm sorry!"

Zachary put his hands to ask for forgiveness while stealing glances at Joseph while he recounted all that had happened to his group.

To Zachary, Joseph was much more frightening than the bookstore owner before him. However, Joseph was being so deferential toward the bookstore owner. This meant that the young man at the counter was even more fearsome than Joseph. Zachary definitely could not afford to offend someone even more powerful!

So that's the case...

Lin Jie felt his heart ache a little when he heard the reason as he recalled the television reports of the tragic situation at 67th Avenue he had seen. Lin Jie had already come up with some guesses, just that he didn't want to bring it to light. And now, there was even less reason to send them to the police station.

"Haa... Since you know it's wrong and you are sorry, don't do such things ever again."

For a second, Lin Jie thought about it but realized that these people probably couldn't afford to buy books either. However, being helpful had always been a principle of his, and thus, he flashed a bright smile and said, "Since you are so hungry, have a meal with me."

Zachary's legs turned to jelly out of fear the moment he heard this.

"No need, no need. Thank you for your kindness." Zachary waved his hands and kept muttering, "We'll leave now, we'll leave now."

Zachary had indeed gone hungry for several days, but at this moment, his strength overflowed as he started dragging his accomplices out of the bookstore.

"Hey, wait a minute," Lin Jie suddenly shouted behind him, and Zachary quickened his pace.

"Boss Lin is calling you," Joseph growled, causing Zachary to freeze.

"Is there anything else? Boss?" Zachary looked back, on the verge of tears.

As the saying goes, give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day... Lin Jie mused. "Even if I taught you a lesson today or gave you a full meal, you might steal or rob in future if you encounter the same desperate situation again.

"In that case, I'll give you a book." Lin Jie smiled at Zachary. "It's free, but if this book helps you get out of poverty in the future, make sure to repay me," Lin Jie said as he turned around to pick a book from the shelf behind the counter.

Zachary stood rooted to the spot, feeling somewhat at a loss.

Didn't I say I no longer wished to be a good person anymore... But why did I have to encounter something like this again?!

However, this sensation merely lasted for an instant. When he shifted his gaze to watch the bookstore owner's back, he suddenly realized that the bookstore in front of him wasn't a bookstore. Rather, it was like the deep, dark mouth of a scary beast. The smile of the harmless bookstore owner was hidden within the darkness, filled with an evil bewitching power like poison.

The bookstore owner turned around, having picked out a book which he placed in front of Zachary, who couldn't help but hold his

breath.

“This is a rather dated technique, but it’s still very practical to this day. I believe that it can help show you a brand new path.”

Lin Jie pushed the book titled ***How To Pickle*** across the counter.

Chapter 396: Help Someone All The Way

From Lin Jie's observations, pickles didn't exist in Norzin.

Lin Jie had also read web-novels in the past. The male protagonists in such stories brought with them to the new world things that didn't exist yet. The books in Jie's bookstore were similar in a sense. They held many technologies and information that didn't exist in Norzin.

It was just that Lin Jie was too lazy. Regardless of where he was, he liked being an idler.

In other words, even if he had been blessed with a cheat code, Lin Jie didn't really want to rise in the world.

However, if he handed out all those books with technology from Earth, wouldn't he disrupt the technology tree here? As a proper transmigrator, Lin Jie felt that he needed to be responsible and not impact Norzin on such a great scale.

See, the current Norzin was exactly as it had been since he had transmigrated.

But at this point, Lin Jie felt that he also couldn't just contribute nothing.

The book before him, ***How To Pickle*** , was a technical read.

Lin Jie felt that giving Zachary this technical book was equivalent to imparting the latter with a self-sufficient technique.

Well, the burden of being Norzin's 'Father of Pickles' will fall to you now...

Zachary watched as Lin Jie slowly placed the book in front of him.

His breath caught in his throat as an immense surge of power

washed over him. He strained to read the book's title, and the twisted words drilled into his mind like some sort of horrible music.

— *Necromancy Fragmentation*

These words were like a shrill, sharp scream that pierced through his eardrums and went straight to the brain.

When Zachary saw the book, his fear toward Joseph immediately vanished. It was as if he had been devoured by a ferocious beast and was already in its abdomen before he could even resist.

He even seemed to hear the distinct sound of swallowing.

Zachary felt like he was in an endless tunnel, and the book was a gateway for him to listen to the voice from the deep recesses of this tunnel.

In the dark recesses of this abyss, unknown and eternal divine entities seemed to beat some giant unseen drum as a strange piper played softly beside—the sounds of woodwind were both nauseating and incomparably monotonous.

Zachary just stood there in the never-ending darkness. Every single one of his nerves was clamoring, and even his internal organs trembled. Pain enveloped him, yet something had bound his soul, making him incapable of escaping.

His body that was accustomed to enduring hardships and pain broke out in cold sweat and actually soaked his shabby clothes.

Zachary wanted to stop reading, but the book had a mesmerizing power of bewitchment. It piqued every ounce of inquisitiveness in him.

With a trembling hand, he flipped open the cover for the book and saw the first chapter—

Living Corpses .

Zachary's were so wide they nearly popped out of their sockets as he gasped for air like a fish stranded on land.

Lin Jie was already accustomed to this manner of exaggerated reading from Zachary. Most that bought books from here were like this.

It was actually rather understandable. Gaining knowledge was actually a pleasurable event.

However, most of the stuff he had given out previously were books brimming with chicken soup for the soul. Or rather, books that had a plot and were easier to read. This time round, though, it appeared that Zachary was reading such a purely technical book without pause.

Could he truly be a pickled vegetable genius that only appears every once in a hundred years?

Had it not been for the fact that he seemed so pitiful, Lin Jie wouldn't have been that generous as to give him this book.

Haa... It's really much better to teach a man to fish...

"So, what do you think?" Lin Jie asked abruptly, interrupting Zachary's immersed reading.

Thunk.

It was like a bell striking hard on Zachary's head.

"Ah—huff, huff—" Zachary gasped while sweating profusely. "This book... this book is actually..."

"That's right. It's a rather old technique that mainly talks about how to preserve certain vegetables." Lin Jie folded his arms and propped them on the counter-top while glancing at the open ***How To Pickle*** on the table.

"Vegetables?" Zachary mouthed that word with a trembling voice. He lowered his head to stare at ***Necromancy Fragmentation*** in disbelief.

"That's right, vegetables! Vegetables on their own can't last long, rotting quickly and becoming inedible," Lin Jie explained with a

smile.

Vegetables? Rotting?

Zachary's eyes widened in shock, and he glanced down to take a second look at the book.

Could... vegetable be referring to a 'corpse'? Like making puppets or mummies?!

Zachary had once been a believer of the Church of the Dome. Later on, that faith was flagged as a cult, and the police had come to his door to help him identify what a heretic cult was. One officer mentioned that a cult would use a sacrificial method to make ordinary people kill themselves.

But ever since Zachary witnessed the scene at 67th Avenue, he was completely in the belief that divine entities existed in this world.

And this smiling young boss in front of him with a scholarly demeanor might be that kind of terrifying existence.

He views human corpses as foodstuff...

"This book will tell you how to preserve them and make them more delicious," Lin Jie subconsciously licked his lips as he continued the explanation... Truth be told, he hadn't had any pickled vegetables since he had arrived in Norzin, and just mentioning them tantalized his taste buds and made him salivate.

Zachary couldn't breathe. He stared wide-eyed as the young boss spoke excitedly about how to cultivate living corpses...

After taking sometime to think of a response, he said cautiously, "Perhaps this method of preservation can give them new life, right?"

"Exactly!" Lin Jie was impressed by Zachary's precise metaphor.

That's right, pickled vegetables gave new life to normal vegetables. Lin Jie, for example, didn't like cabbage, but pickled cabbage was a must for fried rice.

The combination of spicy cabbage and fried rice with sausage, ham, and eggs was simply the best.

“You’re totally right.” Lin Jie was now aware that his drooling seemed slightly indecent, and he quickly put on a mask. “Besides increasing the shelf life, it also gives it more tastes and uses.”

Besides sacrificing human corpses, there are other uses for cooking mummies and undead warriors?! Are they to be eaten after being used?

“Don’t look down on this technique. It’s actually rather scientific,” Lin Jie concluded calmly.

“W-why me?” Zachary struggled to ask.

“No reason, just that I like to help those that are lost,” said Lin Jie like an otherworldly expert. “Perhaps you can use this book to change yourself.”

Zachary froze.

“But speaking of which, you’re really penniless now and won’t really be able to truly get back up even after I have given you this book,” Lin Jie mulled for a moment.

Indeed, even if I really want to kill and sacrifice people to create living corpses, I don’t have the guts nor ability to do so... Zachary thought nervously.

“By the way, Mu’en,” Lin Jie voiced out, having thought about it and decided to help out all the way. “I recall that Father Vincent’s Sun’s Faith often helps the poor...”

Mu’en’s eyes narrowed. As the next highest-ranking in the room after Boss Lin, she could clearly see the book in Zachary’s hand. On it was the title, ***Necromancy Fragmentation*** .

“That’s right, Boss Lin.” Mu’en nodded.

“Great,” said Lin Jie with a smile. “I recall that there’s a Sun’s Faith church in the area around 23rd Avenue. Go find him. At least there would be a place for you to stay.”

Chapter 397: Shocked For Quite A Long While

“Don’t worry, Father Vincent of the Sun’s Faith is a kind and righteous man. He’ll help you,” said Lin Jie with a kindly smile.

Haa, you must at least have a roof over your head before you become the king of pickles... Lin Jie thought to himself.

Mu’en’s usually calm face revealed a pensive look after hearing what Lin Jie had said. The young girl glanced at the book in Zachary’s hand and couldn’t help thinking about the discussion that she had with Vincent in the dream realm.

As usual, everything Boss Lin did was definitely farsighted.

In that case, he had just been a refugee that had entered the bookstore by chance. Why gave him such an important book, and why sent him to the church?

Yes, that book could shake Mu’en even with her level of foresight. That was enough to prove the importance of this book.

Mu’en fell into deep thought.

Vincent had said before that the goal of the Sun’s Faith at this stage was to weed out impure people and take over the Norzin upper echelons. It was only natural that Boss Lin would know about her meeting with Vincent in the dream realm.

So, could it be that Boss Lin was worried about Vincent’s plan and sent someone to help?

At this moment, Mu’en suddenly felt that everything made sense!

That’s right. Boss Lin was able to control time at will. He was an existence that transcended the current plane. Therefore, in his eyes, everyone’s actions were just mere lines that he could easily read

with a single glance.

All possibilities were exposed to him, and so were the threat level of foes. It was reasonable for him to do something in advance to change the future.

Looks like the enemy this time is rather troublesome...

Mu'en's gaze fell on Boss Lin, and she noticed him giving her an encouraging smile as if to say, "Mu'en, remember to tell Vincent when you go to the Central District."

Indeed! He wants to tell us to be careful.

Mu'en nodded. "Don't worry, Boss Lin. I'll let Vincent know."

Lin Jie rubbed Mu'en's head and his smile widened. "I look forward to your future performance."

With such a sensible and capable assistant, what more could one ask for?

As Zachary looked at Lin Jie, his heart that was originally filled with fear and pain seemed to be soothed by Lin Jie's warm smile in an instant. Once the fear subsided, uncontrollable gratitude filled his heart.

"Boss Lin..." Trembling, Zachary clutched the book to his chest. Years of just slogging away at work made him unable to say anything of value. In the end, he could only earnestly mutter, "Thank you. You're such a good person."

When Lin Jie heard this, he felt refreshed. All his efforts hadn't been in vain.

Haa... It isn't too bad to help lost sheep like these once in a while.

"Bring your friends that have fainted from hunger to the church too," said Lin Jie as he pointed at the bunch of refugees lying on the ground. "By the way, after you learn this age-old technique, be sure to let your friends try some. I'm sure they'll like it very much."

Lin Jie had utmost confidence in pickled vegetables. There was no way anyone wouldn't adore pickled vegetables.

"F-Friends, try this technique...?" Zachary almost let go of the book he was clutching as his eyes widened in fright. He gulped and slowly turned back to his comrades lying on the ground.

While he was only with them for a short time and didn't know what they did before being homeless, they were still living people after all. How could they be refined into living corpses?

"T-This isn't a very good idea... Boss Lin," Zachary said with a trembling voice.

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow. *What's with that lack of confidence! Confidence is the first step to success. There's no trying without self-belief. Sigh... You've really disappointed me, Zachary!*

"Have faith in yourself, you understand?" Lin Jie put on a solemn expression and said, "Confidence is the first step, while having heart is the foundation of success. If you don't let them try it, how can you make them follow you wholeheartedly?"

Wholeheartedly...

All the hairs on Zachary's body stood on end when he saw the look Lin Jie gave him. Immediately, he was terrified and bowed at once. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Boss Lin. I shouldn't hesitate. I got it, I'll do it right away!"

Only then did Lin Jie nod in satisfaction. "If you got it, then go on your way quickly."

Zachary nodded, then scrambled to drag his fallen friends.

Joseph, who was standing at the door, eyed Zachary and interjected, "I'll send you. It's not easy carrying so many people along."

Lin Jie blinked and asked, "Is that okay, Joseph? Didn't you want to hide your identity?"

Joseph nodded. "It's fine. It's just down the street anyway. A Sun's Faith brunch happens to be there."

"Alright then, don't take too long." Lin Jie waved his hand and returned back to a comfortable sitting posture to continue reading. Just as he was about to start, he suddenly looked up and saw the shattered wall across him.

His mood was instantly ruined.

Although he had previously deduced that the wall breaking had nothing to do with Joseph, Lin Jie was still crestfallen. Repairing the wall was quite a huge expense!

With a refugee heaved over each shoulder, Joseph walked ahead of Zachary. He glanced at the far end of 23rd Avenue while sensing Zachary's unsteady footsteps behind him.

Having achieved Supreme-rank, he now had a completely different view and understanding of the entire world.

Joseph did a quick glance behind him. This homeless refugee was clutching the precious book. His life would be drastically changed by it, but... he hadn't completely accepted the book yet.

It was clear from the shifty look in his eyes.

Fully accepting the book meant complete purity and devotion. The sort of purposefulness that ignored everything else in order to save and sublimate oneself.

But he hadn't yet reached that stage, just like the Joseph from a long time ago.

He was hesitating and struggling, contemplating between the future and the past. He still didn't know which side to accept, but at the same time, he was already overjoyed at having obtained such power.

Boss Lin might not care about the existence of such uncertainty, but Joseph couldn't allow it.

He needed to give a warning.

This was the iron-blooded way that he had always upheld... for a long time, even before he even became a Radiant Knight.

Joseph stopped at the front of a side alley intersection and turned around.

Zachary skidded to a halt and almost ran straight into him.

“Wha...”

Baam!

Joseph punched the wall beside him with such force that he actually dented the wall with his pure physical strength and caused the ground around him to fracture.

A trembling Zachary backed away and raised the book in front of him and said, “Y-Y-Y-You, what are you trying to do? I-I was also given a book by Boss Lin. Y-Aren’t you loyal to him?”

Joseph retracted his fist and said indifferently, “You’re right. We are indeed loyal to him. But what about you? Are you clear about where your loyalties lie?”

He un-clenched his fist, revealing fine powdered stone that scattered into the wind.

Zachary glanced at the wall beside and saw that there was a fist-sized hole in the center of the dent.

“S-Sir, I will always be loyal to Boss Lin. I will give up my life and everything for him!” Zachary squawked. His legs lost all their strength and he nearly knelt to the ground. “I swear it! I will never betray Boss Lin!”

Joseph’s eyes glowed faintly. “Remember what you said. Boss Lin can take back your power at any time.”

Zachary quivered. “U-Understood!”

“Humph, clown!” Joseph snorted coldly, unsure whether he was angry at his past self or that he felt it wasn’t worth it for Boss Lin to help these ignorant people.

He glowered as Zachary scrambled away with his unfortunate companions in the direction of the branch church. Then Joseph turned and headed back too.

A short distance away, Lin Jie, who had planned to chase after Joseph to accompany him in buying some material to repair his wall, witnessed this scene.

He stopped in his tracks and scratched his face in a bafflement.

Then he turned around and took two steps toward the bookstore, then stopped and turned back around.

“No way, Joseph... just smashed that wall?”

Lin Jie had blamed the cracked wall in the bookstore on the aftermath of an earthquake since Joseph hadn’t touched that wall at all. But now he had witnessed Joseph’s actions from start to finish.

He clearly couldn’t lie to himself that Joseph hadn’t just smashed a wall.

Are you otherworlders... all that physically strong?

Lin Jie remained shocked for quite a long while.

Chapter 398: The Night Elves' Plan

“Since long ago, we’ve always believed that the Brood-mother was this world’s ruler of fate and the fabricator of the night elves’ future,” Stephanie articulated calmly.

“I’ve worshiped her from when I was little, and as long as we maintain our love, reverence for her, and believe in her original intentions, we would be able to fulfill our wishes and breathe new life into our clan.”

So...

Brood-mother Sandalphon, once a core member of the Path of the Flaming Sword and master of weaving fate, had eventually met such a ridiculous fate.

Stephanie didn’t laugh out loud when she thought about it, but she felt that this event was rather ironic.

While she believed in the Brood-mother, she was even more inclined to believe in the workings of fate.

Wasn’t the weaver of fate that fell into fate’s bindings also a form of fate?

Stephanie was seated within a small and gloomy tree house. She had a pair of violet eyes on her delicate face and a silver curl that draped her back like a white clock. Pointed ears indicated her elfin identity, but her dark skin revealed a night-like ominousness.

Night elves had never been favored by light.

She gazed at the interior of this tree-house. It wasn’t too big and seemed more like a tavern. Although space was limited, there were currently more than ten people inside, either sitting or standing around.

There were many taverns like this in the Village of Dark Night, but this particular one was destined to be different.

And the young and beautiful Stephanie had been the convener of this gathering.

These people summoned by her were here for a meeting that would change the Village of Dark Night.

Ever since Sandalphon died in the battle against the moonlight, the Village of Dark Night had become a godless land.

Most of the Brood-mother's fanatical believers had already crumbled and split. Only a few scattered members lingered, still stubbornly searching for evidence that the Master of Fate hadn't yet died, or... a new hope.

There weren't many members left, but they were still a powerful force and were led by Stephanie, the young 'Spider Woman.'

They needed to find a new path ahead for night elves.

Stephanie didn't tell everyone what her plans for the future were right away. Instead, she recounted about how the Village of Dark Night led by the Brood-mother was like from her memories when she was still a young girl.

"Lady Stephanie—" a rather aged night elf interjected. His voice was hoarse, his skin dark and wrinkled, yet he held Stephanie in unparalleled respect and couldn't bear to look directly at her. "This is a disrespectful thing to say, but the great Brood-mother has already left us. We cannot dwell on the past forever."

Stephanie put down the glass of red wine she was holding, revealing the sorrow in her eyes. However, there wasn't any hint of mockery in her heart as she sighed, "You are right, Lil Darby. I really mustn't be like this."

"Yes, you are now the leader of the dark elves. The futures of all of us are in your hands," the old dark elf who had been addressed as Lil Darby said hoarsely.

“Mm, even if the Brood-mother has utterly given up on the Village of Dark Night, we can’t give up on ourselves. We have to rely on our own two hands to fight for a greater future,” said Stephanie as her dark violet eyes scanned the audience.

“On the bright side, at least...” Stephanie went on, “we no longer have to work for the Path of the Flaming Sword any more, am I right?”

‘But... the Brood-mother said...’

“If not for the Path of the Flaming Sword, then what should we do now?”

“That’s right. Without the Path of the Flaming Sword to rely on, once the Central District discovers our movements...”

Worried chatter spouted in the tavern the moment Stephanie said her last sentence.

“Even the Brood-mother is gone, so what can the Path of the Flaming Sword do? From now on, we can no longer allow ourselves to be the pawns of others. Every step we take must be for ourselves...” Stephanie whispered softly, “The Brood-mother’s death comes at the worst time for us, but it’s also the best time.

“From now forth, the road to the Lower District that was excavated for the Path of the Flaming Sword completely belongs to us. The Ash Chamber of Commerce can no longer order us around but listen to us instead. This is a great opportunity for us.”

Stephanie raised her hand and revealed a slight smile. Beneath the dim light, her dark violet eyes shone with ambition. “As long as we control all the resources in the Lower District, we can fully replace the Truth Union and Rolle Resource. Even the Central District is nothing to fear. Do you all get it?

“Right now, the ones that control all transcendent objects and resources are us!” Stephanie’s smile broke into a grin.

The era of Lower District’s resources being controlled by Rolle Resource and the Truth Union was about to pass.

With the Village of Dark Night as a stronghold, the dark elves can continuously export resources to Norzin's Upper District. When the time came, they would become an important channel like the main artery in a body.

The dark elves never expected such a magnificent blueprint. Upon hearing Stephanie's depiction, they couldn't help getting excited.

Stephanie continued, "At present, the only path that can lead to and plunder the Lower District is the one that us dark elves control. With the Ash Chamber of Commerce for trading bulk and connections, we will soon be able to establish a powerful trading network. At that time, even the Central District will have to acknowledge us."

"But, even if we control those resources, it won't be easy to sell them... First, we have to go up against the Central District; after all, they are the ones that decided on Rolle Resource's mining. And with the great Brood-mother now gone, the Ash Chamber of Commerce might not be that acquiescent." A middle-aged dark elf hesitantly raised these points. "Besides, the Ash Chamber of Commerce seems rather unstable now, especially that Cherry..."

"You're right. That's why we must have a reliable partner to bank on." With that, Stephanie put her hands together and gave two claps in the quiet tavern.

A young-looking middle-aged man in a suit and wielding a ceremonial cane stepped out from the tavern's inner room. He walked over, and with a confident smile, raised his hat slightly to show his respect to the dark elves in the tavern.

"Everyone, I'm Hoffman, patriarch of the Ash Chamber of Commerce's Sapir Family." He leaned on his cane and gazed at the dark elves before him in a neither servile nor overbearing manner.

The relationship between the dark elves and the Ash Chamber of Commerce was never as hostile as the outside world claimed. The cooperation between them had long been intimate.

The reason for the so-called hostility was just to hide their

relationship from the Central District.

The human druid and dark elf hybrid, Cherry, was born from an intimate encounter between dark elf and human, a proof of cooperation and the product of a marriage alliance. Unfortunately, the result of this hybrid was beyond their imagination, and she gradually became a ticking time bomb.

At the same time, this meant that the dark elves' partners in the Ash Chamber of Commerce were actually the Chapman Family.

But now, the one that had come to the Village of Dark Night was the Sapir Family's patriarch.

"It's been a long time, Sir Darby." Hoffman bowed slightly and lamented, "I was merely a boy of sixteen when I was last in the Village of Dark Night."

Darby's eyes were assessing and wary, but he smiled. "Yes, it's been a long time."

Hoffman didn't seem to mind and returned the smile. "The Chapman Witch, Cherry. She's gradually turning the Ash Chamber of Commerce into her own playground in an attempt to monopolize power. Moreover, she is one of those from the bookstore and is very much against the Path of the Flaming Sword. In other words, this means that your cooperation with the Chapmans will probably be over soon."

Stephanie laughed mirthlessly. "That little mix-blood... is just a tool of a past marriage alliance. Can't believe it festered till this point."

"Her growth was down to someone..." Hoffman lowered his hat, casting a shadow on his face. "That existence on 23rd Avenue."

The dark elves in the tavern fell silent.

The moonlight that had killed the Brood-mother came from 23rd Avenue.

"But it doesn't matter now." Hoffman raised his head, his lips curving into a smile.

“According to my informants, that existence is no longer helping Cherry in secret. He’s chosen someone else instead, and Cherry...is still in the dark.

“A great being’s temperament can change on a whim. One will get tired of playing with toys and toss them aside eventually. Without the bookstore owner, Cherry is merely a useless tyke that can be gotten rid off easily.”

“That’s right.” Stephanie nodded. “Hoffman, help me tell her that she has dark elf blood running in her veins. It’s time for her to return to her hometown after staying in the prosperous human world for so long. Tell her to come see the Village of Dark Night and that her mother misses her very much.”

“Indeed, it’s normal to come back home to visit loved ones.” Hoffman flashed a wry smile and raised his wine glass.

Stephanie lazily raised hers as well and closed one eye while gazing at the Village of Dark Night through the wine glass with her other. The scene of the village seemed as if it was dyed red—

“On a long journey, having a little mishap wouldn’t be too out of the ordinary, right?”

Chapter 399: It's A Small World

Ash Chamber of Commerce, Chapman Family branch.

At the largest trading center in Norzin, millions of dollars exchanged hands every day. As a commercial juggernaut led by a family business, the Ash Chamber of Commerce held many legends that rich people told.

However, no one would have thought that Cherry Chapman, one of the three branch heads of the Ash Chamber of Commerce, the mixed-race girl known as Chapman's Witch, was currently... lazing in bed.

Swish—

Bella, the head maid of the Chapman Family, who had watched Cherry grow up, suddenly drew the curtains open. Harsh, cruel light flooded through the window, filling up the room that was clearly decorated by a young girl.

"Excuse me, my lady," Bella said, folding her hands over her midriff.

Cherry's entire body was stuck in the soft, cake-like bed. When the sunlight hit her eyes, she turned around and rolled up in her pink quilt, turning into a squirming caterpillar.

"Bella, I recall that there's no morning meeting today..." From within the quilt, Cherry purred impatiently like an annoyed cat.

However, Bella didn't joke with her little master this time. Instead, after a moment's hesitation, she said, "The Village of Dark Night invites you to go home and pay respects to your ancestors and departed family."

Cherry, head buried in a pillow, was silent for a moment. Then she turned her head to Bella, her silver eyes revealing a sharp gaze that didn't look tired at all.

“Village of Dark Night... Would these people still invite me?” Cherry half-smirked as she looked at the delicate dark skin on her arms. “I thought that in their eyes, I was just a by-product of a transaction. A cheap and disgusting mixed-blood that should be thrown away.”

“Yes, they’re up to no good,” Bella gave her worried opinion. “Ever since the fall of the Brood-mother, the Village of Dark Night has been without a leader. It has stayed like that... But recently, they’ve pushed Stephanie, whom they call ‘Spider Woman,’ to the new throne. She’s now the new leader of the dark elves.”

“Though not every dark elf obeys her orders, she has at least gotten control over the majority of them.”

“Oh?” Cherry eyes narrowed before she chuckled. “Seems like they still love being brainless boot-lickers.”

Bella continued, “It’s Stephanie who invited you this time round. She said that the night elves have a big business deal they wish to cooperate with the Ash Chamber of Commerce on. Her exact words were, ‘Rather than doing this business with others, it’s better to do it with my own little granddaughter.’”

“Huh?” Cherry sat straight up and pointed at herself. Part angry and amused, she said, “What granddaughter of hers am I?!”

“I’m not going.” Cherry didn’t hesitate at all. “They are just a bunch that aren’t at all interesting.”

Bella didn’t immediately accept Cherry’s order. Instead, after a moment of silence, she hesitantly spoke, “I’m afraid she already knew that we would refuse. So, she said that it didn’t matter if you refuse, but there’s something to inform you about: Due to the collapse of the Brood-mother’s lair, the Village of Dark Night has to implement a large-scale land filling. And—”

Cherry froze for a moment as if realizing something. Then her eyes widened with disbelief as she stared straight at Bella.

“And your mother’s grave will be shifted...” Bella clenched her

teeth and said.

“How dare they!!!” Anger rushed to Cherry’s head. Her silver eyes appeared to burn with flames as she stood up abruptly. “If they touch even an inch of my mother’s grave, I’ll make them pay...”

An image of that gentle, silver-haired woman flashed in Cherry’s mind. She had been the only woman who had shown her warmth.

She had once held Cherry in her arms and gently brushed the wounds she got from peers throwing stones at her, telling the young Cherry that she was a girl born with love and not a monster despised by everyone.

While there hadn’t been any love in that union which was rather painful to her, she loved Cherry....

Cherry took a deep breath and ordered, “Prepare the car.”

Bella replied, “Right away, my lady. To the Village of Dark Night?”

“No,” answered Cherry. “To the bookstore. I wish to... say goodbye to Mr. Lin.”

Lin Jie was seated at the counter of his bookstore, but it was rare for him not to be reading. His arms were crossed while he rubbed his chin with one hand. He had a pensive look on his face as his gaze fell on Joseph, who was cleaning the bookstore.

The muscular Joseph was wearing a slightly ill-fitting shirt, which made him look all the more bulky. He also had on an apron and held a whisk broom as he carefully helped to tidy the books, making him appear very out of place.

Lin Jie wanted to say something but stopped himself; instead, slapping himself on the forehead and sighing.

Joseph was the reason why Boss Lin was in this state.

When Boss Lin had run out after Joseph to get some materials for repairing his broken wall, he had witnessed Joseph breaking yet another wall with a punch.

That incident had caused Lin Jie's view of the world to change.

Afterwards, he had even gone over to the wall and investigated carefully. Ordinary men surely couldn't break this wall and would get injured even attempting it. However, Joseph had the strength to break this wall and was actually fine after it.

Naturally, Lin Jie started thinking. *It seems like there was only one sort of explanation for such a situation... Joseph is actually a transcendent being, right?*

Or rather, I just can't generalize people. Perhaps people like you from this world can smash walls with a punch when you are extremely angry?

According to his previous study on the Truth Union's documents, as well as Candela's existence, it proved that transcendent powers did exist in this world. However, Lin Jie thought that it was merely the stuff of legends, like the mythical creatures from the Middle Ages back on Earth.

But now, Lin Jie reckoned that he had misunderstood.

Especially when Lin Jie recalled that at the banquet, Ji Zhixiu hadn't seemed surprised by the entire Fred Family's sudden demise... as if she already knew.

However, although Lin Jie was rather suspicious, they had always been keeping in touch and getting along rather normally.

Wouldn't it be a little... awkward if I were to ask a strange question like "Are you guys usually so strong?" or "Do you guys have superpowers?"

Haa, how do I make it less awkward? Lin Jie mulled.

Screech—

Sharp screeching of brakes from outside the bookstore interrupted Lin Jie's train of thought. He glanced in that direction and looked through the door's transom windows to see a pair of beautiful leather shoes peek out from behind the door of a black luxury car.

"Mr. Lin!" As soon as he heard the lively voice of a girl, the image

of the voice's owner had already appeared in Lin Jie's mind.

A girl in a white dress got out of the car and stepped into the bookstore with ease. However, her face changed slightly when she saw an unfamiliar old man inside.

Though completely different from the Great Radiant Knight who was rumored to be dead in terms of appearance and aura, his appearance at this time... would have answered a lot of guesses.

Especially since Wilde, who was supposed to be working with Cherry, seemed to have completely disappeared from the face of the earth.

However, the little lady was quick to adjust herself.

"Mr. Lin, it's been a long time since I've seen you." Cherry walked briskly with small steps. Her silver hair danced and her skirt fluttered in the air, drawing beautiful arcs in the air. Her cute smile revealed two tiny canine teeth. She hopped up and sat on the bar stool in front of the counter, swinging her little feet.

"What's with the sudden visit? You didn't inform me in advance." Lin Jie immediately put on a professional smile and looked toward the little lady warmly. However, Cherry, who was usually sticky toward him, hung her head and didn't look up. After a while, she finally revealed a pitiful little face and puffy red eyes.

"What's wrong? Why are you crying?" Lin Jie pinched the girl's soft face and asked with a frown.

Cherry pursed her lips and pouted. "I got up too early this morning. It's all Bella's fault."

"Ahh, I see... Lazing in bed isn't a good habit." Lin Jie smiled slightly. "From the look of things, you aren't here to borrow books today, right? Is there something you want to say?"

Cherry raised her head, meeting the looming bookstore owner's jet-black eyes.

Just like he was very far away from her, as if he had never changed

from the first time they met all those years ago.

Wasn't it wrong for mortals to expect the pity of gods from the beginning?

Otherwise... Otherwise, how would those people have dared make a move...

"I... came to say goodbye to Mr. Lin today." Cherry had a smile that wasn't like her usual one. It wasn't adorable, but there was a strange gentleness and determination incongruous with her child-like appearance.

Lin Jie paused, then heard Cherry continue. "I've decided to protect someone who is very important to me, even if she's no longer around... There are still some things that have to be defended. For this, I can make sacrifices, but it might implicate others.

"Mr. Lin, if it were you, what would you do?"

Lin Jie reached out to rub her head and said gently, "I've always felt that whenever in a dilemma, everything will work out if you follow your heart.

"You should already have an answer in your heart when you came to ask me. Besides... You've already come to say goodbye."

Lin Jie chuckled and added on, "Go wherever you want to go. You are no longer who you used to be, right? If you ask me, Cherry is so adorable that she will succeed in whatever she does because the heavens can't bear to see you cry... Of course, I can't bear to either."

While comforting Cherry, he wiped the tears off her face. Though he didn't know what had happened, he needed to humor her at this time.

Cherry clenched her fist and nodded vigorously. "Yes, because I met Boss Lin, I'm different from before."

"Alright, don't you worry," Lin Jie chuckled. "It's a small world. Perhaps, we might meet each other somewhere else soon."

Chapter 400: It's Really A Small World

The Kadath Family wasn't considered too well-known in Norzin.

Their forebears and previous generations weren't prominent. And heading back further, it could even be said that they had been fortunate to obtain their nouveau-riche status. In a place like Norzin where status was important, even Rolle Resource's Ji Family was frequently pointed out and criticized, it wasn't hard to imagine what it was like for the Kadath Family that wasn't really reputable.

In fact, the family only officially moved to the Central District in recent generations.

If not for the gradual purging of those nobles with no real power, they would probably have had to wait a few more years.

Even so, the Kadath Family was still among the upper class of Norzin and were an existence envied by many.

Susan, the head maid of the Kadath family, was in the hall of the duplex villa. She looked up at the long spiral staircase leading to the top floor of the villa.

On the top floor was the eldest young miss's room. Ever since she had returned from Lady Ji's birthday banquet, the young miss had hardly left the room, and even her food was being sent in to her.

Moreover, ever since the young miss returned, the entire house had gradually become deathly silent...

Susan wasn't too sure if she was imagining things, but she kept feeling flustered. Everyone else seemed like lifeless robots, and she would occasionally catch hidden glances from the corners or hear strange whispers.

And when she went to investigate, all traces melted away like snow

under the hot summer sun. Everyone's smiling faces would return, leaving her at a loss.

Pursing her lips, Susan went up the spiral staircase. Susan's heart felt increasingly uneasy the closer she got to the young miss' room. Finally, she reached the heavy mahogany door and halted.

Susan took a few deep breaths. *It doesn't matter... At least, the young miss is definitely fine!*

She had been at the Kadath household ever since the young miss was a child of six. The anxiousness in her heart eased slightly as she recalled how clever and adorable the young miss had been as a child.

The young miss' only hobby since young had been to pursue all things related to occult, which the old master only laughed off and treated it as a child's curiosity.

Perhaps... this was just all a prank of the young miss.

"Miss Charlotte?" Susan called out softly, then knocked lightly on the door. "You haven't eaten for a few days. Madam has asked you to come downstairs for dinner."

There was a long silence behind the door, and Susan's heart pounded.

"Eat?" The young lady's pleasant sounding voice came from the door. Her tone was calm, yet her pitch was somewhat strange. "... I'm indeed a little hungry. Susan, come on and help me change."

"Phew—"

Susan let out a long sigh of relief. Her heart that had been in her mouth gradually calmed.

What? Isn't it all completely fine? thought Susan to herself. She had watched the young miss grow up after all.

Susan headed in, the door creaking as she pushed it open. Susan noticed a few candles burning in the dark room and that the

windows were firmly shut—

“Miss?” she called out apprehensively.

Baam!

The door shut on its own.

Susan let out a panicked shriek and turned around to the door that had closed on its own. At that moment, she felt icy cold breathing from behind her and heard a sound of what seemed like something squirming.

Her entire body trembled, eyes widening as her face turned pale. She could clearly sense a creature standing behind her. Slowly, she turned around as every cell on her body screamed out in fear—

“Ahhhh!!!!” Susan’s eyes were wide open in shock as if she had seen a demon.

The thing was a bloody lump of flesh, yet it also seemed like a huge octopus with countless tentacles covering the entire room as if turning the place into its nest.

In the middle of the lump of flesh was the hideous sight of a pale young lady’s body—that wasn’t Charlotte but her good friend, Danae.

Before Susan could react, black tentacles shot out and wrapped around her, entirely engulfing the head mad in a second.

The lump of flesh gradually made some swallowing sounds before squirming for a bit and revealing a head.

The ugly twisted head didn’t belong to Charlotte, but it had the scarred face of an old man—Wilde.

“I nearly forgot,” Wilde opened those beady snake eyes of his and muttered to himself. “That maid should be the last person that hasn’t been controlled by me yet.”

As soon as he said that, the tentacles of the squirming mass of flesh

loosened. Susan's body fell to the ground like a corpse, her skin pale and bloodless with some vicious fluid all around it. Her pair of blue eyes had turned completely dark, like deep holes.

Then, that lifeless body started to move on its own like a robot, making actions that humans weren't capable of. Twisting its arms in an unbelievable fashion, it suddenly got back up.

"High Priest." Susan fell to her knees, filled with a look of rapt fanaticism.

Wilde nodded, then slowly retracted his tentacles. His disgusting and bloody appearance was drawn inward as if he had taken off a set of clothing, revealing the figure of a beautiful young woman.

This was Charlotte Kadath's appearance.

Wilde walked to the full-length mirror and observed his reflection with a cold, emotionless gaze, yet he had on a strange smile. Then he spoke with a clear female voice, "Congratulations, you have recovered well and can completely adapt to this body already."

This was Charlotte's consciousness. Now that she and Wilde were almost symbiotic, their consciousnesses weren't completely fused, but they were overlapping and had completely synchronized thoughts.

"If not for Teacher's letter, I would really have been dead." Wilde sighed, then started to think again—

That battle was in Boss Lin's control. Could my being alive be because of Boss Lin's will too? In this sense, perhaps I might be able to continue working for Boss Lin. But before that, I have to make Joseph pay.

Wilde turned toward Susan. At this moment, she had already been taken over by the soul of a believer that he had previously devoured.

"I still need to continue increasing my strength if I wish to defeat Joseph. This definitely requires the Corpse Devouring Sect to exist."

'Susan' answered respectfully with a man's voice, "High Priest, ever

since the battle at 67th Avenue, most members of the Corpse Devouring Sect died... They died as martyrs, while the rest have been surrounded.”

Wilde scoffed. “Boss Lin has long expected this. I previously worked with Boss Lin’s subordinate from the Ash Chamber of Commerce, that Chapman Witch. A portion of the believers have been planted within the Ash Chamber of Commerce, and it’s time to use them now.

“Contact them. I’ll go see Cherry Chapman now.”

Cherry Chapman gazed out the car’s windows. Passing streets reflected in her listless eyes. She didn’t understand why she had come to see Boss Lin.

Was it because of... some unspeakable love in her heart? Time and again, she had clearly seen the distance between herself and Boss Lin.

One could love a god, but never fall in love with a god.

Or perhaps it was because she wanted Boss Lin’s help? However, Boss Lin hadn’t given her anything, merely saying that line—“We will definitely meet again.”

Cherry gave a self-deprecating smile. She gazed at her small palm and muttered to herself, “Cherry, you must live well. Regardless of the difficulties you face, it’s all a test given by Boss Lin... After all, I still wish to see Boss Lin again.”

The weather had been mild while they were in Boss Lin’s bookstore, but it had now started to rain. Layers of rain water washed the car windows and made Cherry feel as if the whole world was submerged in the deep sea.

It was a very suffocating feeling.

Suddenly...

Screech—

The car braked hard. Fortunately, Cherry was wearing a seat-belt or she would have been sent flying.

“What’s going on?” Cherry frowned and turned toward the front. An umbrella-wielding young lady in a gorgeous white dress was standing in front of the car. On closer inspection, the young lady was clutching a book to her chest. Her slender frame was like a rose swaying in the wind, but her eyes were always on the ground.

Only transcendent beings could sense the surrounding aether surging. An aura full of threat was rising.

“You...”

Bella recognized that the young lady was from a noble family of mortals. She was just about to give her a warning, but Cherry stopped her.

Cherry’s eyes met the gaze of the young lady, and she suddenly realized that the latter had a pair of beady, dark green snake-like eyes.

She had only seen such eyes on one other person. *Could it be...?*

Cherry’s eyes widened as she saw the young lady nod at her before walking to the side of the car and opening the door, about to let herself into the car uninvited.

Cherry’s heart pounded rapidly as her throat felt parched. She took a deep breath and said, “Long time no see... Mr. Wilde.”

Wilde, with the appearance of Charlotte, replied in an old, hoarse voice, “Not bad, you can still recognize me.”

Cherry practically couldn’t contain her ecstasy.

Wilde was still alive! Boss Lin sent him to help me! He was really speaking the truth. It’s really a small world!

Volume 5

Chapter 401: Let's Go Have Some Fun

Mu'en was in a taxi headed for the Central District.

The many roads and streets in Norzin were like a wide spreading spiderweb. Thus, for convenience purposes, there were many taxis. However, after entering the Central District, public transportation vehicles were much fewer because in the Central District where the nobles were, almost every household was equipped with expensive cars.

The girl in the taxi soon became the center of attention.

Mu'en's expression didn't change. She was as nonchalant as ever in this old and rundown taxi.

She had nothing to worry about. These tools, in her eyes, were just like humans—everything equal.

However, the ordinary driver didn't feel the same. In the surroundings were expensive luxurious vehicles and even horse-drawn carriages that were popular among some ancient noble houses. An accidental scrape might easily cost him an amount he would never come close to in several lifetimes. He picked up a towel and wiped the sweat off his forehead, feeling immense pressure as he parked his car at the heart of the Central District.

The driver glanced at Mu'en. This girl, who was calm like water, had an extraordinary air about her. One look and he could tell that she was the eldest daughter of a noble family which he wouldn't dare offend.

With a nod and bow, he said, "Um, miss. My shabby little car can't enter the area ahead. I'm sorry but you'll have to get off here."

Upon hearing this, Mu'en tilted her head slightly and thought about what was the normal thing to do here. Then, she took out some

money from her bag and handed it to the driver. "Thank you, this is the place."

This was the first time Mu'en had left the bookstore and returned to the Central District. It was impossible to say that she didn't feel anything deep down, but her personality was usually calm. Right now, she only felt some slightly inexplicable emotions.

It had been more than half a year ago when she had escaped from the Truth Union laboratory in the Central District and had been in an extremely sorry state.

But now, she could return to this area so openly.

Of course, these were mere ripples in her heart that calmed in no time.

Her main purpose for coming this time was to transform the villa Ji Zhixiu had given into a branch of the bookstore and officially start their plan.

Mu'en had already informed Vincent about the important undertaking that was the opening of a branch. However, when Mu'en got out of the car and counted the house numbers, she didn't see Vincent even when she reached Area A, No. 48.

However, there was still a while before the designated time, so there was no hurry.

Area A, No. 48. This had originally been the residence of the Fred Family, but unfortunately, their second son had offended Boss Lin.

The Fred Family that was rather renowned throughout the Central District had been instantly destroyed. A large part of their manor had been instantly set ablaze and reduced to ashes.

However, the Fred manor in front of Mu'en had been bought over and renovated by Ji Zhixiu. It had regained its magnificent appearance that hadn't changed at all because of the passing of its former owners.

Boss Lin was really cruel sometimes...

However, his cruelty was not that of humans, but the gentle cruelty like that of time.

Mu'en stood in front of the Fred manor in thought.

Through her binoculars, Eliza, the noble lady of the Morgandi Family next door, spied a girl of about 15 or 16 standing before the abandoned Fred Family mansion.

Her expression revealed a slight hint of doubt.

“Possan, what’s the current status of the Fred Family mansion now?” Eliza raised an eyebrow and asked the butler beside her. “As a noble, it’s necessary to know if our future neighbor is decent.”

“I remember that the Fred manor was bought by the Ji Family of Rolle Resource. Have they resold it?”

The butler replied, “No. It’s as you know it. This manor still belongs to the Ji Family. There hasn’t been any news of the ownership being transferred.”

Eliza frowned. Could this fair-skinned, clean, and petite girl, who was dressed somewhat impoverished, be from Rolle Resource?

She didn’t look like a maid or servant—servants couldn’t be that beautiful. And at the same time, which rich family would dress their servants so plainly. Servants were important assets of the nobles and represented the face value of a noble household...

“Is this girl from the Ji Family?” Eliza asked with a raised eyebrow.

Possan moved forward and bent down slightly to take a good look at Mu'en. After thinking for a bit, he shook his head. “Madam, this girl isn’t from the Ji Family.”

Eliza covered her face with her feather fan and lifted the hems of her skirt, then said, “Come, let’s go have some fun.”

Staying home all the time was way too boring.

These sorts of fun-seeking actions were Eliza’s only pastime.

Mu'en observed the manor expressionlessly as she patiently waited for Vincent and the help she needed to arrive.

While the original manor was gorgeous, it wasn't suitable for operating a bookstore and needed to be modified.

"It's quite a fine day, huh?" An exaggerated female voice suddenly came from Mu'en's side.

Eliza, wearing a feathered hat and followed by an entourage of servants, came up to Mu'en and said with a giggly voice, "What a beautiful girl. May I ask what you are doing here? Is there anything you need help with?"

Mu'en glanced at Eliza, then ignored her.

How rude! Eliza's eyebrow rose and a bulging vein had appeared on her forehead. However, due to her good noble upbringing... and the astonishing beauty of the girl in front of her, she endured it.

"Miss, what are you doing here? If you wish to take a look at houses, just know that the prices here are really expensive," said the grinning Eliza. "Well, it's fine for little girls to have dreams."

Mu'en instinctively wanted to stop her from talking nonsense, but at this moment, she remembered Boss Lin mentioning before that building a good relationship with neighbors was also a secret recipe for doing business.

Hence, after a moment's hesitation, she said, "I'm here on behalf of my boss to open a bookstore branch."

"Eh?" Eliza acted as if she heard an unexpected answer. "I just said that property prices here are very expensive..."

"Miss Ji Zhixiu has already given this house to my boss." Mu'en really didn't want to continue talking to her, so she directly cut Eliza off.

Eliza's fan-flapping hand halted as she recalled what the butler had said previously. With a snide smile, she said, "Lying isn't a good habit. Things would be bad if the Ji Family hears this. You've got to

be careful with your words and actions.”

Coming all the way to the Central District to spout such nonsense is just too foolish... But since she said it was her boss, then she's just an assistant. So the one who instigated this child to come and do such deliberately offensive acts is that boss, right?

Elisa thought to herself. *This Boss is really unpleasant, making such an honest child come over. If she hadn't run into me but some other noble, wouldn't this child be in big trouble?*

Gosh...

Moreover, his brain must have been zapped by lightning to intend on having a bookstore here. Which person living here didn't have a family legacy spanning for generations? Which one of these families didn't have grand libraries spanning for many square meters? Who would even need to buy books?

Before Mu'en had even said much, Eliza's imagination had already run wild as she imagined a plot-line of 'an unscrupulous and evil boss making use of child labor and having her suffer for his own entertainment.'

But fortunately, the child had met her. As long as she exposed the lies of this boss, wouldn't this beautiful child be eternally grateful to her? At that time...

Eliza couldn't help breaking into a grin, but she quickly used her feather fan to hide it.

"I say, you've really met a baddie..." Eliza continued her ridicule. Unfortunately, she was interrupted once more, this time not by Mu'en but by another group of uninvited guests.

Eliza blinked in bewilderment at the group that had hastily come over.

Vincent, in white prayer robes, walked over from somewhere. On his robes was an embroidered sun made of golden threads. Behind him were a dozen of followers who knelt and bowed when they reached Mu'en.

“O Great Moon, you shine with the night, eternal in time.”

Eliza’s eyes widened in surprise. “...Huh?”

Vincent came before Mu’en and bowed with his hands to his chest. “I’m really sorry, Lady Mu’en. I just received news that Wilde’s aura had appeared and was delayed for a bit.”

“It’s alright. I came early.”

Mu’en seemed accustomed to Vincent’s formalities and nodded in response.

Eliza couldn’t hide her surprise and her mouth was now agape. She knew who Vincent was—the pope of the recently founded Sun’s Faith. Because of the religion’s rapid expansion and preaching, Father Vincent had become a hot topic amongst the nobles of Area A. Of course, there were some that loathed him.

But even Eliza’s husband, the head of the Morgandi Family, had a hard time even trying to make an appointment with him.

Yet, such an esteemed figure had actually bowed to this shabbily dressed girl. In her bewildered stupor, Eliza felt a rude tug on her arm.

“Who?” Eliza glared. But before she could flare up, she saw that it was her always-reserved husband.

“Who asked you to come out?” Morgandi chided.

He nervously wiped beads of perspiration off his forehead and gave Mu’en an apologetic smile. “My wife is insensible and has disturbed you, lady.”

Mu’en glanced at him, not even taking this matter seriously at all. She shook her head. “Not at all. It was just a casual conversation.”

Seeing that Mu’en didn’t really care about him, Morgandi didn’t wish to embarrass himself anymore, so he dragged Eliza home.

As soon as they returned to their own manor, he pressed Eliza’s

shoulder and sat her down on the sofa. He heaved a sigh of relief and chided vehemently, “Did you know that I just received news that the Fred Family manor has been transferred by the Ji Family to a person called Lin Jie? And that guy’s assistant is the legendary Saintess of the Sun’s Faith! Those are people from the Sun’s Faith. Ordinary people might not know, but you understand clearly that it was those crazy fellas that annihilated the Church of the Dome!”

Morgandi took a deep breath, trying his best to keep a straight face. “Tell me, had you been about to act out again just now, like those little ladies you raised in the past?”

That’s right, the filthy ways of nobles were commonplace, and Elisa, this noblewoman, had a fetish for raising beautiful girls.

“I didn’t know. I just found that girl very beautiful...” Eliza changed the topic aggrievedly and said, “That Lin Jie person... Who is he?”

This question stumped Morgandi. How would he know why some bookstore owner was valued by the Ji Family and somehow became the boss of the dignified Saintess of the Sun’s Faith?

“In any case, he’s a very powerful person! Somebody that no one can afford to offend!

“By the way, I’ve heard that he’s working together with the Ji Family and sold five books. Now that the auction is about to begin, I wonder how it will turn out...”

Eliza sat on the sofa, feeling aggrieved, but her heart was on fire once more. *How hallowed was this bookstore owner? Could it be that the books sold are very different?*

She definitely had to take a look at this auction.

Chapter 402: Reveal The Truth

Eliza Morgandi, the noble lady of the Central District's Morgandi Family, raised the gilded invitation in her hand, her silver bracelet sliding down her fair arm. Although she had been married for decades, she still looked like a young lady.

Within the Central District, there were many legends around the Morgandi Family. For example, with regards to Eliza, it was always rumored that the lady of the house raised beautiful girls in her house and drank their blood to maintain her beauty.

With regards to this, Eliza had to clarify that—

These were no rumors. The truth was as such.

However, these beautiful girls of hers were obtained through 'legitimate means.' In the circle of aristocrats like themselves, such things weren't uncommon occurrences. Moreover, compared to others, the Morgandi Family had done relatively little.

Perhaps because they were slightly picky.

As a core aristocrat close to the heart of the Central District, it could perhaps be said that the Morgandi Family possessed some transcendent power. It was true that blood from beautiful girls could be refined into a secret recipe for beauty.

"This is my first time participating in such an auction." Eliza adjusted the mask that was used to conceal her identity and pouted like a young girl. She had gone through great difficulty to get her hands on a ticket to participate in this auction.

The land trading that the Morgandi Family did meant that they had the power and ability to come into contact with true transcendent beings, but the auction held by the Ji Family didn't have any other restrictions. It could be said that Eliza had exhausted all her connections in order to obtain the invitation to this auction.

Naturally, she wouldn't let go of things she wanted that easily.

Eliza sat very far back and looked around. She realized that many of the participants here hadn't assigned any subordinates but came in person. Moreover, there were many familiar faces and even a few big shots that would make most tremble in fear.

Such a high-end event... Eliza lamented.

Bright lights shone onto the stage's right, and a rather familiar person stepped out from the darkness and walked over to the auctioneer's position.

"Greetings, everyone." Ji Bonong stood on the stage and scanned the scattered audience. There weren't that many people, but those that could be considered to have a reputation within the Central District were here.

It wasn't just people that had attended the banquet from before, but there were also a few uninvited guests as well.

"I'm very happy that all of you honored our agreement and have gathered here," Ji Bonong said with a smile as he glanced at Ji Zhixiu, who was seated below.

"Since you've all come here, I won't hide the existence of the bookstore's reclusive entity, the source of power and the owner of all knowledge that I revere."

"Bookstore's reclusive entity..." Eliza frowned and couldn't help muttering, only to realize a young lady beside her expressing the same doubt.

She glanced at that young lady, and her face brightened. Then she found the latter's face familiar. Scouring through her memory, Eliza recalled that this young lady was from... the white magician family—Curtis Family's Franca?

"Hi?" Eliza raised her hand and waved at Franca as a hint of desire flickered across her eyes.

Haa, this young lady from a transcendent family is really pretty... And

I've heard that she's practically a mixed-blood with half mortal lineage and has no transcendent ability?

"Hi, Mrs. Eliza," Franca responded brightly as if the two were desk-mates whispering in class.

"Are you here to buy books too, Miss Franca?" Eliza lowered her head and asked in a hush voice.

She had faith in her own affinity. Regardless of gender, those that interacted with her would usually let their guard down against her innocent appearance.

"Mm, my servant, Mike, is very interested in one of those books," Franca replied somewhat sheepishly.

In truth, she was the one who was interested.

Back at Miss Ji's birthday banquet, one of the books titled ***One Thousand Classic Home-dishes*** had caught her eye.

While she was the only daughter of an esteemed white magician family with thousands of years of history, Franca didn't have any transcendent talent. Even though her father comforted her and protected her in all sorts of ways, she couldn't help feeling a sense of guilt and inferiority.

But the guilt didn't diminish her interests, for example, in... domestic work.

Therefore, she needed to get her hands on ***One Thousand Classic Home-dishes*** .

However, directly saying that she liked to cook was too downright embarrassing! Thus, she had to use Mike as a guise... *Sorry Mike!*

"I see..." Eliza glanced at Mike, who was standing behind Franca, her smile not faltering in the slightest.

The powerful hunter was like a wolf, staring fixedly at Ji Bonong on stage with a burning gaze but never looking at Franca.

This yearning gaze could be seen on the faces of many participants of the auction, as if everyone desired those books greatly.

However, to Eliza, this auction was the most boring one she had ever participated in. Auctions she usually went to had lots which included slaves, jewelry, antiques, and rare beasts. Such grand events were filled with people, singing and dancing.

On the contrary, at the current event, it seemed like everyone only had one goal, and that was to obtain those books.

This was simply torture for Eliza, and she would have been bored to death if she hadn't met Young Miss Franca.

"What about you, Mrs. Eliza? Do you want to get a book too?" Franca asked.

"Me? I came to see that bookstore owner. Did you know?" Eliza got gossipy and inched closer to Franca. "Even his assistant is a saintess of the Sun's Faith."

Franca was quite surprised as she recalled catching a glimpse of that bookstore owner at Miss Ji Zhixiu's birthday banquet. *That bookstore owner was really quite... hmm, ordinary?*

The two of them originally wanted to continue chatting, but Ji Bonong knocked the gavel on the table, and loud crisp sound echoed throughout the entire venue.

Ji Bonong looked around and exchanged glances with Ji Zhixiu, who was now backstage. The latter gestured to her subordinates, and an exquisite box was presented and gently placed on the lonesome table in the middle of the stage.

The box was embedded with four noble emeralds that contained the power to suppress and seal. Just two of these emeralds alone was more than enough to purchase a house in the Central District.

However, these were mere complimentary gifts for purchasing the books.

Ji Bonong gazed at the box. The books given by Boss Lin were just a

trial to increase his believers and those he favored. At the same time, it was also an opportunity for Rolle Resource. If they did well this time, Rolle Resource would become the sole distributor of such books in the future.

Becoming the chain connecting Boss Lin and his believers was a great opportunity for Rolle Resource, and they needed to firmly convey Boss Lin's will.

He walked to the center of the stage and gently opened the delicate box.

"What everyone is seeing is the first book of tonight's auction. Considering that some people can't directly look at such powerful knowledge, I'll say the name of this book— *R'lyeh Text* !"

Whoosh...

It seemed as if the words Ji Bonong spoke were from another world. Those murmurs that contained terrifying syllables instantly shocked everyone present. He had indeed underestimated the transcendent beings present as most of them could see the title. However, the price was an unimaginable nauseating sensation and a swelling pain in their heads.

Now, the venue had started to become chaotic.

Yet, Ji Bonong could actually read out the title of this book. Had he already reached such a level of strength?

The language he spoke seemed to turn into some sort of incantation and murmur which mangled the sight and hearing of those transcendent beings present.

"Huh?" Franca tilted her head. Limited by her mortal sight, she picked up the monocular and aimed it at the stage. She saw the title of the book. *Isn't that **The Old Man and the Sea** ?*

She was rather surprised. Could she be mistaken?

Wasn't this book titled ***The Old Man and the Sea*** ? Why did he say that the title was ***R'lyeh Text*** ? Could it be... that she couldn't read?

Franca began to doubt herself. She had always been an ordinary person with no transcendent talent, leading an ordinary life where she was usually very careful. Now, she was in a dilemma.

Perhaps... perhaps I'm the only one who can't understand this mysterious book?

Besides, President Ji also said that some people aren't able to directly look at these books. Ah, luckily I didn't say it out loud. Otherwise, I would have been the only fool at this venue and become the laughingstock of the family... Franca was slightly relieved.

Wait, Mrs. Eliza doesn't seem to be a transcendent being either. Is that possible she also... Franca quickly turned toward Mrs. Eliza, who was still smiling happily. Then, Franca's eyes widened in horror.

The young and beautiful Mrs. Eliza's face was aging rapidly, becoming wrinkled and loose like the skin of an old woman. Her eyes were almost open to their limits that they were practically on the verge of bleeding.

However, Eliza seemed oblivious, staring intently at the book on the stage, her carefully maintained nails making deep scratches on the table.

The noblewoman muttered incomprehensible words as her voice became that of another person's, old and frightening. Resentful faces of beautiful girls kept appearing beneath her loose skin, making her appear like a tattered leather pouch filled with souls.

Ji Bonong's voice echoed from the stage. "This book, just like the tip of an iceberg, can reveal the truth behind certain things..."

Chapter 403: Chaos

Franca's eyes were wide open as she stared at Eliza.

"Ah...ah..." Franca raised her hand and pointed at Eliza. "Mrs. E-E-E..."

"What's the matter?" Eliza suddenly turned toward Franca and asked, her voice hoarse like an old lady. "Why are you looking at me this way?!"

"I-I-I..." Franca gulped. Although she had almost no transcendent talent, as the only daughter and heir of a white magician family, she had more or less witnessed transcendent power, or at least had some sort of understanding regarding them.

Moreover, since she was a young girl, Franca's mother had imparted to her the philosophy of life—that power came at a price. Perhaps Mrs. Eliza had used some transcendent power that required her to pay a price...

"I-It's nothing." Franca forced a smile.

"Nothing?" Eliza's eyes were nearly popping out of their sockets as she grabbed Franca's wrist with her age-spotted hand, which was nauseating to look at. "Did you just think that I was ugly?"

"No, no!" Franca shook her head violently in fright.

"You are lying!" Eliza had a crazed look on her face. She suddenly let out a furious roar and shook off Franca's arms. Then, her own hands that were covered in blood from scratching the table reached toward Franca's fair and slender neck.

"Argh!" Franca screamed before she saw a cold gleam flash by—a knife flew past, slicing through Eliza's wrist as if it were tofu. Blood spurted out and splattered all over Franca's white muslin gown.

Franca fell backward awkwardly and landed on her butt.

Eliza released a monstrous shriek of pain as she fell to the ground, rolling in pain.

A graceful figure, like a shadow, appeared from backstage. All present could tell who the silhouette that had accurately thrown a dagger across the entire venue was—

The uncrowned king of all hunter groups, the leader of the Spider organization—Ji Zhixiu.

Ji Zhixiu said coldly, “Anyone that disrupts the auction, dies.”

All the participants at the auction were sobered up by the first instance of spilt blood as they struggled to wake up from **R’lyeh Text**’s bewitchment.

“Those who can’t withstand the arrival of the bookstore’s reclusive existence and are corrupted by knowledge are free to leave,” said Ji Bonong as he casually toyed with the gavel.

The entire hall fell into a strange silence the moment he said that. No one wanted to give up this great opportunity, but the immense power of **R’lyeh Text** before them wasn’t something ordinary people could withstand.

Everyone present was at least a Pandemonium-rank transcendent being. Other than Eliza, who had somehow managed to sneak in, most of the others had already thoroughly assessed their own strength.

However, **R’lyeh Text** could surprise them. Deep down, all of them were clamoring to have it for themselves, but they too knew the price they would have to pay.

Eliza’s body was quickly dragged away by the staff working behind the scenes. The blood on the ground was quickly cleaned up and there was even a fragrance in the air that covered the smell of blood, as if no one had died there at all.

Franca was helped to her feet by Mike. The hunter nodded at Ji Zhixiu across the venue to express his gratitude.

Although, in truth, had Ji Zhixiu been any later, Mike would have immediately snapped Eliza's neck.

Baam—

The crisp sound of gavel smacking the table resounded throughout the hall, and the new round of auctions began once more.

Everyone present was from a prestigious family, and money was the thing they lacked the least.

However, what Franca wasn't aware of was that everyone present was under an immense and invisible pressure. Not a single person even dared to raise the paddle with their number on it.

Ji Bonong gleefully observed the situation beneath the stage. It wasn't them choosing the book, but the book choosing the person.

How would they be qualified enough to buy the book? Naturally, that would only be Boss Lin's decision.

Sand in the hourglass on stage flowed softly, making a slight rustling sound. However, no one in the hall raised their hand.

Ah... Wouldn't Uncle Ji Bonong be embarrassed? Speaking of which, the price isn't very high, so why isn't anyone raising their hands? Should I give him some face and make a bid?

...Franca's mind that had been frayed from the scare that Eliza had given her previously was not starting to work again.

Just as she thought about it, a small paddle was raised.

Ji Bonong squinted. *This person is... the Truth Union?*

The scholar seated beneath the stage was a little terrified, but he held an emblem with many symbols inscribed on it. This emblem with gems inlaid on it had been personally issued to him by the Chairman of the Truth Union for the sake of retaining his rationality at crucial times.

In a certain sense, he was indeed representing the Truth Union's

Chairman, Maria.

As it should be... thought Ji Zhixiu to herself. *It was just like Boss Lin had said, **R'lyeh Text** was given to the Truth Union.*

It was said that the Truth Union's Chairman had reached Supreme-rank and that she was a decent person. Ji Zhixiu had originally thought the Truth Union wouldn't be participating in this auction, but they had actually sent personnel on the sly.

As expected of Boss Lin, he saw everything since the beginning... Zhixiu mused in silence.

Ji Bonong had the same line of thinking as Ji Zhixiu. He hit the gavel three times and the book was auctioned off to this Truth Union scholar.

The lid of the box was closed once more the moment the sale was finalized, and that immense sinister pressure looming over everyone was instantly removed. Many heaved sighs of relief, but the muttering in their ears and the realization of that massive gulf in power made them unable to think rationally.

"The next book—" Ji Bonong announced loud and clear, " ***Soul of Vengeance***. This blazing flame comes from the deepest desire in human hearts, more than capable to reforge one's soul."

Ji Zhixiu beckoned to the servant beside her, and another exquisite box was brought out.

This time, there were four rare and lustrous amethyst crystals that sealed and suppressed this book.

Amethysts and emeralds had different types of sealing ability. Emeralds had a calming and soothing effect, while amethysts crystals had even rarer power of soul sealing as compared to emeralds.

Ji Bonong smiled and opened the box gently. A faint violet smoke was emitted from the book, and on it was written—

Soul of Vengeance .

Was this... the forging of a soul?

Mike, the hunter standing behind Franca and protecting her, was already on the verge of being corrupted. At this moment, he was sweating profusely as if he had just been struck by lightning and was experiencing the pain of his soul being stripped from his body.

If the previous ***R'lyeh Text*** was unbound incantations and whispers of an evil god, then ***Soul of Vengeance*** was the pain of tearing the soul apart.

Previously, when Franca had been attacked and nearly killed, it wasn't because Mike didn't want to move. Rather, it had been because he couldn't move.

Previously, it had been an erosion of his body, but now, it was the refinement of his soul.

“Grr...”

Mike let out a suppressed growl, while those around him also revealed expressions of pain and infatuation. Things at the venue started to appear as though it was going out of control, and some people even shouted incomprehensible things.

All except for... Franca.

She anxiously wanted to consult Mike but was nervous and at a loss at the same time. Her nerves were so bad that she felt like crying.

W-what's going on?

Why am I seeing the title of the book differently! What's wrong with everyone?!

*So is this book **The Count of Monte Cristo** or not? Ah, someone please tell me...*

Chapter 404: I Want That Book

Franca was conflicted. She really couldn't get this auction. Every book was different from what she saw, leaving her unable to differentiate what was true. She, too, didn't dare say anything, but everyone else seemed really excited.

Mike let out a suppressed growl, like the whimper of an injured beast as everyone fell into a state of blurry confusion. When Ji Bonong took out *Soul of Vengeance*, this immense power had struck their consciousness once more, and even ordinary folk could clearly discern the crumbling gap between their souls and bodies at this very moment.

Ji Bonong had a smile on his lips. The situation unfolding before him was what he had imagined.

Seku Family, Palachi Family, Aldreu Family, Ludwig Family, Hanno Family, Stuart Family... Ji Bonong recited in his heart as if he were counting something.

Two-thirds of the Central District nobles were gathered here.

To think that these oppressive and powerful noble families would have such a day... Just days ago, they could come to Rolle Resources and order him around like a dog, but now, they weren't even aware that they were like quarries that had fallen into a hunter's trap.

All of you will have to pay the price for oppressing us Ji and the exploitation of all the poor and common folk!

I'm going to thoroughly kill all of you—

This is what I, Ji Bonong, have been waiting and hoping for till this very day!

His grip on the auction gavel tightened in excitement as glee nearly overwhelmed him.

“Father, Father!”

Ji Bonong suddenly heard Ji Zhixiu call out from behind him. He immediately looked over and realized that he had been in a daze on stage for quite a while.

He couldn't help feeling a little shocked at this realization. When he glanced at ***Soul of Vengeance*** once more, he suddenly became aware that even he had been bewitched by the book.

Cold sweat broke out on his back as he silently recalled the contents of the book that Boss Lin had given him— ***Void Palm*** .

“Father!” Ji Zhixiu called out again and Ji Bonong realized that his daughter was trying to remind him that someone had raised a paddle.

Hmm?

In just a few minutes, Ji Bonong had understood the horror of ***Soul of Vengeance*** and couldn't help wondering who this book would belong to.

Ji Bonong looked up at the only young man who was maintaining his calm in the chaotic venue. The brown-haired boy with a freckled face who was raising his paddle.

Isn't he... a descendant of the Katya Family? Ji Bonong fell into thought. He would have to go back to the time when his daughter was still learning to speak when the Katya Family was still around.

Even Ji Bonong wasn't able to know all the concrete details. After all, at that time, he hadn't yet fully inherited all of Rolle Resource.

The only thing he knew, though, was that the Katya family had disappeared in an instant. That family that had once been one of the top ten families with a reputation famed throughout Norzin's upper echelons was wiped out because they didn't get along with the other families.

Ha-ha-ha, that's great! This book, this person. It would make for a great performance!

Ji Bonong cheered. There was no better way to die than at the hands of an avenger of a ruined family.

“Young man, is this your choice?” Ji Bonong asked gleefully.

“Yes. Yes, but for the time being, I...” Tom Katya said timidly. He was the last descendant of a down-and-out family and was already resigned to the fact that he had no hope of revenge. He had chanced upon an invitation by accident and had strangely found his way to this auction. If he were to trade his sole life, perhaps he might be able to write a new legend.

At the moment when he saw this book, boundless power filled his soul.

Every inch of his soul was clamoring. This was his last burning hope and his only chance.

The opportunity was fleeting and he needed to seize it. Even if he was broke, he was still urged on by the same mysterious power that had guided him into the auction and made him raise his paddle.

“It’s fine!” Ji Bonong smiled, assuming the professional demeanor that Boss Lin usually had. “As long as you have the courage to bid for it, you can take however long you like to repay the master of this book.”

“Thank you, Mr. Ji Bonong.” Tom choked up with emotion. “Thank you so much.”

Tom slowly reached out and took the book that had been brought to him, staring in awe at the blazing flames that were all over the book’s jet-black cover.

The Count of Monte Cristo ... Haa, that’s a boring sounding name. Books like these that depict the lives of aristocrats are everywhere. Why would all these people be so excited as if they are seeing such a theme for the first time...

Young Miss Franca looked all around her while being lost in thought once more.

When will I be able to get the recipe book I want?

But in fact, Franca didn't have to wait long as Ji Bonong presented the third book of the auction—

This time, it was an exquisite sandalwood box sealed by rubies. Emeralds represented mind, amethysts represented soul, and rubies represented flesh and blood.

At this moment, everyone in the audience was already at the limits of their mental threshold and could easily collapse at any moment.

And this book was the final and heaviest blow...

Ji Zhixiu, who was backstage, knew that even she herself would find it difficult to withstand this book, which was a feast of flesh and blood.

Ji Bonong slowly opened the wooden box. Although ***Soul of Vengeance*** had nearly affected his state, the next book probably wouldn't have that much of an impact as it could turn a reader into a believer of Boss Lin's near instantly.

However, Ji Bonong had long been one.

The more he came into contact with such things, the more he believed in great divine existences like Boss Lin.

When the book was revealed, the entire venue seemed to be engulfed by the color of blood—

The book was titled ***Blood Sacrifice*** .

Chaotic aether seemed to warp everything as a tumultuous stream of consciousness instantly filled up everyone's minds.

Tables and chairs turned into livers, while walls became flesh full of fat. The floor became a pool of gastric fluids, bright lights on the ceiling became rows of eyeballs. Ceiling beams turned into interconnected intestines, wires became blood vessels, and the book

It was no longer a book but a beating heart with countless veins connecting it to the other tissue.

Some people sighed in satisfaction, while others screamed in fear. The entire hall almost instantly descended into chaos. There were even some people present that mutated on the spot and their bodies disintegrated.

Only Franca raised her hand high.

"I want that book!" Franca proclaimed loudly, afraid that others might act quicker...

I want it! No matter how much it costs! This recipe book!

Moreover, this time, the young miss had seen very clearly that there were the words 'Complete Colored 365 Days Edition' written on it. This was just awesome. She definitely wouldn't suffer a loss even if she bought it for collection purposes. Norzin had never seen such a book before.

"You... want it?" A surprised Ji Bonong asked.

"Yes," said Franca, smiling broadly. "I'll take it, no matter how much it costs afterward."

Franca—of course, Ji Bonong knew her. The only heir of the reputable white magician family, the Curtis Family. However, she was also known to everyone as... trash.

Blood Sacrifice could definitely be considered to rank second in terms of how frightening and powerful it was amongst the five books Boss Lin had given him.

Franca...? No way, right? But nobody else raised their hands. Did the book choose her?

"Alright, this book is yours." Ji Bonong was still baffled, but he obeyed the will of the book.

Franca quickly skipped over gleefully to collect the book. This joyous skipping was a familiar scene to the nobles that had known

and watched Franca since she was a young girl. But now, in the eyes of everyone, this young lady in a white dress was like a gorgeous grim reaper dancing and skipping on flesh.

She took the beating heart and clutched it tightly in her arms, revealing a comforted smile like a young girl hugging her favorite teddy bear.

Chapter 405: Time To Head Home

Franca skipped back to her seat, having achieved her purpose for attending this auction.

“We can go now, Mike,” said Franca with a satisfied smile.

Ji Bonong fell into thought as he watched Franca head off. For a moment, he couldn’t tell if Franca was crazy or calm.

He then turned to gaze at the other guests.

The order in which Boss Lin had chosen was thought, soul, flesh, and upcoming was fate... Most of the audience that hadn’t been chosen either had their thoughts controlled or shackled by their souls. At this moment, their limbs and bodies had started to melt or reassemble.

Yet, Franca was perfectly fine.

Ji Bonong thought to himself, *She is the owner of that book, after all, for being able to take **Blood Sacrifice** away. Perhaps that’s her merit, being able to stay calm in the face of such a terrifying scene. Such a person can calmly offer her own kind to the divine.*

“Mike, come on.” Franca turned back and called out to her servant once more.

“Yes, my lady.” It was like Mike had his soul sucked out of him. He gazed at Franca and followed after, not knowing whether it was because of his desire for **Blood Sacrifice** .

While Ji Bonong was puzzled, he instantly came to an understanding.

After all, the book had already made its choice, and this was the best outcome.

“Let us continue.” Ji Bonong rearranged his thoughts and smiled at the audience in front of him.

Upon hearing another book titled **Book of Destinies** being presented, Franca turned around just as she was about to leave, curious at this book which had caused a rising murmuring among the audience.

She stopped and looked back at the book, only to see the title read **Water Margin ...**

However, she no longer wanted to understand why this was so. Perhaps she was just that lousy. Franca couldn't help feeling a little uncomfortable deep down, and thus, she clutched the book tightly and left.

Sigh, these books are probably books that only idiots can't understand. ..

Franca resigned herself to the fact that she was probably an idiot.

This auction kept making Franca feel a little uncomfortable. While she was rather mediocre, she still attended gatherings of transcendent beings all the time. Transcendent beings would always be different from ordinary folk, pitiful creatures who hovered on the edge of madness every day.

But even so, Franca had never been at a more suffocating gathering than this one.

Ji Bonong gazed calmly at the audience before him.

Since he consecutively read out four books already, the limbs of weaker transcendents in the audience had already started to fuse. Only the Truth Union representative, the descendant of the Katya Family, and a Secret Rite Tower member that had been chosen by **Book of Destinies** were spared.

Now, as they read ravenously, the others were just mere trash.

However, these trash did form the entire upper echelons of Norzin. How very ironic.

In just a short while... their thoughts, souls, flesh, and fate... were all controlled by Boss Lin.

Ji Bonong turned around and exchanged glances with Ji Zhixiu. His daughter immediately understood, and the next box with a book inside was brought to the stage.

“Next up, I’m bring up a book personally written by Boss Lin.” At this moment, Ji Bonong’s every move would cause cheers and moans in the audience. An abnormal air of fanaticism had enveloped the entire venue.

Inlaid on the top of the black box was the most mysterious creation—Black Agate.

Spiral patterns were on the completely black gemstone, as if they were the eyes of a god, staring intently at the people at this auction.

With their thoughts in a mess, souls separated, bodies on the verge of crumbling, and their fates locked in, the audience fell into an excitable state of silence when they saw the black wooden box.

Peace enveloped everyone, caressing them like a mother would to her newborn child.

Ji Bonong slowly opened the box, revealing the black-bound book lying peacefully inside, as if it were waiting for someone to flip it open.

Pain was instantly relieved, and all the nobles in the audience regained their rationality at the last moment, as if finding a stream of water after being stranded in the desert for a long time.

This book written by Boss Lin appeared to have reshaped their thoughts, souls, bodies, and fate.

“So, does anyone want this book?” Ji Bonong said with a bright smile. Then he watched as everyone knelt down piously, chanting the Lord’s name.

Ji Bonong smiled, then turned to his daughter. “You can begin, Zhixiu.”

A light chuckle sounded from behind the curtains, and a huge... creature gradually emerged from backstage.

Ji Zhixiu had fully activated the sordid blood in her body, and her originally graceful frame transformed into a huge half-wolf form. The hairs on her silver mane stood on end, and her orange-yellow beast eyes were icy-cold as she let out an indecipherable roar.

This was like the snarl of an alpha wolf in the forest, or perhaps the call of a queen bee in a hive. With this single command, the pupils of all the kneeling audience turned golden.

—Control. A means of control using the law of the jungle.

The plan has gone extremely smoothly... Ji Zhixiu let out a low growl.

As one of Boss Lin's first few favored, Ji Zhixiu used her high-level suggestiveness through her sordid blood along with the mental symbiotic characteristics of the Great Race of Yith to control these people at the moment they became subservient to Boss Lin.

Right now, the goal of the father-daughter duo to control the entire Central District was half completed.

"Father, victory is in our hands," said Ji Zhixiu in a beast-like guttural growl.

Ji Bonong couldn't help but chuckle softly, but his laughter got even more intense and crazy that he nearly couldn't maintain his human form.

"Uh..." A sudden voice came from the audience.

Ji Bonong's laughter was interrupted. He glanced up to see a man standing alone in the midst of the kneeling audience.

Ji Zhixiu and Ji Bonong exchanged a glance. Then, the latter asked sternly, "Who are you?"

That man was obviously influenced by Boss Lin's five books and was being controlled by the power of Ji Zhixiu's sordid blood. But he seemed to have something to say at this moment.

"I'm Humphrey, an... agent for the central administration," the controlled Humphrey replied with an empty look in his eyes.

Ji Bonong narrowed his eyes. *Sure enough, the central administration has sent people as well.*

He cursed softly, "These hypocritical trash who call themselves the rulers of Norzin are really disgusting."

"What do you have to say?" Ji Zhixiu glared at this person and questioned. Being able to voluntarily speak up under such circumstances was an anomaly among anomalies.

"I want that book."

"What?!" Ji Zhixiu and Ji Bonong exclaimed in surprise.

Of the five books Boss Lin had given them, this black book was clearly the most important. It was a book that Boss Lin had personally written.

The father and daughter pair had even reckoned that nobody would be able to get this book at the auction.

But right now, the final book seemed to have found its owner.

Of course, Ji Bonong had been a little selfish by secretly hoping that this book wouldn't have any takers so it would belong to the father and daughter pair.

But Boss Lin actually wanted to give this book to the central administration? Why? Was it for a much more profound reason?

They had clearly found out this agent, yet he would be taking this book back... Ji Zhixiu also wasn't too sure if her initial mind control technique would be seen through and broken by the central administration.

Ji Bonong couldn't figure it out, but he couldn't refuse either.

"Since that is so, the book is yours," Ji Zhixiu said calmly.

This was Boss Lin's will. She would never disobey him, even if she had to hand the book to their enemy.

Upon hearing this, Humphrey strode to the stage and collected the book. Then he respectfully returned to the seat with the black box, with the same vacant look in his eyes.

Although he was unwilling, Ji Bonong had to accept that both Boss Lin and the book had made their choice. At least, the plan had succeeded.

"Everyone, thank you for participating in this auction. I believe that all of you have gained something," Ji Bonong said, even though none of the people kneeling in front of him had the ability to think on their own.

Snap.

Ji Bonong snapped his fingers, and the strange, fanatical, and frightening atmosphere of the venue disappeared in an instant.

All the participants woke up from their trance simultaneously. Although they retained their own consciousness, they felt as if they had lost a portion of their memories.

"The auction has concluded," said Ji Bonong with a warm smile. "Everyone, it's time to head home, embrace your families, and enjoy a good dinner."

Chapter 406: We Await Your Return

Humphrey joined the Central District's central administration when he was 21, having a job that almost everyone would envy.

The so-called central administration was considered the uncrowned king of Norzin, or rather, was the ruling authority resided in the first place, just that they hid the crown. The upper echelons were the adjudication bureau made up of twelve people of noble status. With this adjudication bureau as the highest point, they managed the whole of Norzin from the top down.

They allowed other transcendent organizations such as Secret Rite Tower and the Truth Union to emerge, but they had to obey the central administration.

Mortal organizations were allowed to rise as well—Rolle Resource, for example. However, everyone knew that Rolle Resource was the former army of the kingdom and lackeys to those nobles.

Therefore, a job in the Central District's central administration was considered a true 'iron rice bowl.'

Every citizen of Norzin was governed by the central administration from the moment they were born, a truth written in stone.

The central administration's management wasn't cruel, and no one objected to it because they had a large number of transcendent abilities and beings that controlled and protected Norzin's life-blood.

Humphrey's background was rather ordinary. His family's reputation wasn't spectacular, but still much stronger than most commoners. However, at the same time, Humphrey didn't have the talent of a transcendent being. People like him who came from such backgrounds formed almost all of the lower echelons of the central administration.

However, Humphrey was very fortunate, because he witnessed an extraordinary phenomenon and became a transcendent. This phenomenon was the awakening of a power within the blood-line of his family, just that it hadn't appeared for a long time.

Logically, he received training from the central administration, unexpectedly discovering his abilities of detection and counter-surveillance, and becoming a white magician.

Thus, he became an overseer.

He traveled throughout Norzin, assuming various identities, with the main task of investigating all reactionary acts that might threaten the peace of Norzin and the rule of the central administration.

This current auction of Ji Zhixiu's was considered a rather potentially dangerous act since it involved the bookstore.

As an agent of the Central District's secret agency, Humphrey naturally knew about the existence of the bookstore. However, the central administration had always kept a laissez-faire stance toward it.

This existence had clearly turned Norzin upside down. It wasn't just a simple matter of stirring up slight trouble for the central administration; it was more like setting a fire and watching the Norzin burn.

Humphrey had always been puzzled by this. Why was the central administration so lax? But today, he finally knew.

Boss Lin was an absolutely great and unfathomable existence!

Just as Ji Bonong had said, everyone present had received Boss Lin's favor this time. After the auction ended, Humphrey, who had received Boss Lin's personal work, was simply the envy of everyone else.

It was a feeling of reaching the peak of his life and being bathed in holy light as he stood by the side of a divine entity.

Humphrey didn't know why either, but when the book was placed on the table, he suddenly felt a hint of conviction—the greatest purpose of his life was to obtain this book.

And thus, he had gotten up stubbornly and said the greatest thing of his life, “I want that book.”

Now, the auction was already over and Humphrey was holding the book with the unusually peaceful cover that said *Dream of Chaos* .

Dream of Chaos .

This was a book written by Boss Lin himself, perhaps detailing an endless dream realm.

Clutching the book in his arms, Humphrey walked openly on the streets, which he rarely did so as an overseer. In truth, he had been assigned the task of watching the auction and obtaining at least one of Boss Lin's books.

However, the owner of each book had already been decided by Boss Lin. Wanting to obtain one was a mere fantasy.

Yet, Humphrey had gotten it.

However, his goal had changed. Now, he no longer worked for the central administration and just wanted to walk around more. This was because he held Boss Lin's book in his arms and was now the messenger of that oracle.

Perhaps he should go to the slums where the poor lived, to the cruel and cold capitalist factories, or to the underground Lower District, to continuously spread Boss Lin's gospel...

“W-what's that in your hand?! What exactly are you?”

Someone suddenly shouted out in an unfamiliar accent from behind Humphrey.

Humphrey stopped in his tracks and turned around to see a burly figure wrapped in a black cloak.

A black hood covered the face of this mysterious figure and even the boots he wore were jet black. Moreover, the pure black robe seemed to be absorbing the surrounding light. Even when this figure raised his head, his face couldn't be seen as if he were just a walking cloak.

Humphrey frowned. He was sure he had never seen the person standing in front of him, but now that this situation had reached such an unprecedented state, no matter how ruthless a person was, he would be able to deal with him.

Hence, he said kindly, "Hello, I'm the same as you. We're both creations of Mr. Lin in this world. My name is Humphrey. Please let me tell you about our Lord and Creator, Mr. Lin..."

"I can smell a powerful yet familiar scent coming from you," the black-robed figure immediately cut the chatter and said, "What is... Mr. Lin?"

"The creator of this world and our savior." As he said that, Humphrey took out the book and gently flipped it open.

The moment the mysterious black-robed figure saw the book, his eyes, which were hidden beneath his hood, seemed to be on the verge of popping out. A golden glint flickered in them, like those of a ravenous beast, as he clearly saw the words written on the cover

Dream of Chaos .

"..." That black book was like a giant abyss of darkness staring straight back at the black-robed figure.

"Chaos within chaos, with no distinction between you and me..." Humphrey actually opened the book and started to read aloud the contents.

He's crazy! He's actually reciting that book...!

The black-robed man was taken aback, but he then seemed to understand. *No, he's crazy to begin with!*

The recited words didn't flow into Humphrey's ears. Instead, they entered the black-robed man's mind like an electric current that kept crackling...

Humphrey looked up and saw the robed figure start to tremble and let out a mournful moan. That strong burly figure started to bend gradually, and as more contents of the book were revealed, the figure started to feel a pain that kept multiplying, and he twisted up like a shrimp.

This is salvation!

"This process might be painful, but after listening to Mr. Lin's teachings, you will feel as if you have been reborn." Humphrey couldn't help but smile as he observed the robed figure that seemed to be squirming in extreme pain.

The black-robed figure twitched continuously before he suddenly became lifeless.

Humphrey put down the book and said as he walked closer to the robed figure, "Your pain is a new life... Huh?"

Just as he squatted down to check on that robed person, he noticed the body twitch again. Moreover, he could hear a hoarse chanting from beneath the hood.

"The beginning of all beginnings, master of all things, originator of all chaos and order. Everything in front of you is just a dream of yours. Wake up quickly, but don't wake up. In your eyes..."

Humphrey's eyes widened as he stared hard at the book in his hand. What was being recited by the robed man was actually the continuation of the passage he had been reading.

"How do you know the rest of it?!"

Humphrey was thoroughly shocked. *How does he know? Clearly, I was the one chosen by Boss Lin. But how is he able to comprehend it so quickly?!*

The black-robed man clutched the ground as if his entire body was

in pain from being run over by a truck. Then, he slowly got up and lifted his hood.

An indescribably grotesque face appeared.

“Why? Of course it’s because you fake believers are just idiots who follow blindly.”

The robed man’s skin was covered in snake-like scales. His lower jaw was lined with numerous tentacles like those of an octopus, each full of circular suction cups. His hair was sparse, with only a few strands of flowing white.

“Y-y-y-you...?!” Humphrey broke out from his state of fanatical calm by this shocking sight as he fell to the ground clutching the book tightly in his arms.

This gruesome appearance wasn’t one a human ought to have.

It was ancient and terrifying, hideous and ugly.

Only the upper echelons of Norzin knew what sort of appearance the residents of the Lower District had.

The robed man slowly removed his gloves, revealing his similarly scaled hands with thick appendages and sharp nails like the claws of a crocodile.

“What the hell are you—Ahhhhhhh!” Before Humphrey finished speaking, the robed man’s right hand moved so fast like a green-gray afterimage, grabbing onto Humphrey’s neck and stabbing his fingers through Humphrey’s throat as easily as a hot knife cutting through butter.

Blood spurted out as Humphrey struggled like a wounded prey.

“Thank you,” the robed man said hoarsely. “Thank you for bringing my Lord’s gospel to me. Please die peacefully and accompany Him to sleep.”

“May my Lord’s dream be safe,” the robed man prayed, his forked tongue faintly discernible when he spoke.

The robed man threw Humphrey's corpse to the side, then shook off the blood on himself before taking the book—

Dream of Chaos.

When he saw the book, he looked up and saw a dark shadow against the farthest wall of this deserted alley.

Thud!

The moment he saw the black shadow, the robed man immediately knelt to the ground. His entire body trembled, and his yellow, feral eyes seemed on the verge of tears. He placed the book to his forehead, and beads of tears fell.

His voice trembled as he uttered, "O Great Lord, thank you for your guidance. You have led me from the Lower District all the way here. We await your return at the promised land."

The black shadow seemed to nod, yet it also didn't seem to have done anything. It just stayed in the place where light and darkness intertwined and disappeared the moment the street lights came on.

Chapter 407: Inverse Tree

A majestic building stood tall on a high platform in the center of Norzin's Central District.

Besides this high platform, there were also various small buildings scattered around the high platform like orbiting satellites. These buildings were all important places—the Supreme Court, the Supreme Tax Department, the Supreme Police Bureau, parliament...

Norzin was, after all, a large and complex machine. Without its many components and screws, it was basically impossible for the city to operate.

If Boss Lin were here, he might have sighed in amazement. Though small, Norzin's 'internal organs' were all intact.

However, whether these places that began with the so-called 'Supreme' would allow ordinary people to enter or not was another issue.

Built on the high platform in the center of the Central District where every inch of land was expensive was a dense, green, and beautiful man-made forest that citizens of the Upper District would likely never see throughout their lifetime, as well as a massive building hundreds of stories tall.

The forest was used to regulate the air, so people called it 'Norzin's lungs.'

Norzin's lungs? It was merely a bonsai belonging to the Central District.

Even the right to breathe was not something that the poor could easily enjoy. Only the people who lived in the Central District could truly enjoy the so-called refreshing air created by this forest. Others only breathed the residue of industry.

If one were lucky enough to climb up the high platform and look

into the forest, they would be able to see from the front of the central forest the building that seemed to tower into the clouds.

Within it was where the true power of the nobles resided, as well as the adjudication bureau led by the ‘twelve nobles.’

However, this was merely the tip of the iceberg, a drop in the ocean. No one knew that beneath this huge building, thousands of meters deep underground, after passing through countless layers of hard ground and rock... was a massive space.

This place seemed like a dream realm without an end. There was no blue sky, nor sun or moon, only a pitch-black cavern and an inverted tree so huge it couldn’t be described.

This tree was simply too large that it was impossible to imagine its complete appearance. However, the elders gathered under those countless branches knew.

This inverted tree ran through the whole city of steel.

A group of elders in white robes were beneath the tree, so wasted with age that their skin were layers upon layers of wrinkles, making it impossible to glean their appearance, gender, or identity. Hence, they could only be called ‘elders.’

They were the true masters of the adjudication bureau.

One bearded old man, whose big nose looked like a thick, wrinkled worm hanging off his face, probably because of age, stroked his beard and said, “Humphrey, whom we sent to the auction, is dead. Looks like we’ve underestimated the bookstore owner.”

The droopy eyelids of the others’ immediately snapped open, their turbid yellow eyes seemed to have a layer of dust on them, which made for an extremely unsettling sight.

“Mm, besides Inspector Captain Humphrey, the others got infected by the seeds of the evil god,” the big-nosed elder continued.

“Barr, was it that bookstore owner who killed Humphrey?” Another old man with a walking cane asked, his face so droopy as if held

down by weights.

The big-nosed Barr continued solemnly, “No. It was done by people from the Lower District.”

“What?!” The few of them acted as if they had received some shocking news; some even stood up. They were even more surprised than when they found out the disposable personnel sent to the auction had died.

The few of them knew how powerful the bookstore owner was, but the deaths of Humphrey and the other spies sent by the central administration just once again refreshed their understanding of Boss Lin’s strength.

But more importantly, the people from the Lower District... had actually come up!

“How did he do it?!” One of the old ladies was so worked up her entire body trembled, and she was even a little afraid. “How did those livestock from the lower city come up?”

Barr glanced at her and said soothingly, “Calm down, Asmodeus. Don’t be surprised.”

When the old lady called Asmodeus heard Barr’s comforting words, she took a deep breath and calmed down. However, she heard Barr go on, “After all, what you hear next will shock you even more.”

Asmodeus: “...”

Barr carried on unhurriedly, “Because I suspect that, no, I’m certain that the people of the Lower District... have been guided by this Boss Lin.”

Everyone fell silent when they heard Barr say this.

In order to break the silence, Barr continued, as if he was revealing something, “I’m not sure how that person from the Lower District arrived in the Upper District, but he did seem to have received some form of mysterious guidance, to kill Humphrey and obtain that masterpiece said to have been written by Boss Lin.

“This series of events is full of coincidences. The books at the auction will choose their own owners for one. Given that it’s that bookstore owner’s work, it represents his feelings the most. Thus, how is it possible that the useless Humphrey was chosen?

“I’m afraid that...” Barr closed his eyes and let out a long sigh.
“This is all part of the bookstore owner’s scheme.”

“Looks like a big fight with him is inevitable. Since he dares touch the Lower District, he’s messing with the foundations of the whole of Norzin,” the youngest amongst this aged group spoke up firmly all of a sudden.

“Agathare, you’re still as combative as ever,” said Barr with a frown and a slight hint of sarcasm. “But you might as well use your brain before a battle. Do you think that we can beat the bookstore owner as of now?”

Agathare was stunned. He hadn’t expected Barr to admit he couldn’t defeat the bookstore owner so quickly. This fellow had no dignity.

“Humph, timid like a mouse!” Agathare tilted his head to the side sullenly.

“He’s someone who could force the Path of the Flaming Sword to band together, as well as the one who destroyed the Church of the Dome. He also casually instigated two Supreme-rank transcendents to turn Norzin upside down. Have you all forgotten that? And the reversal of time... Had it not been for that existence, we definitely would have been none the wiser.”

The shortest amongst the group spoke up, “I think it’s false that he arranged for the two Supreme-rank transcendents to fight. His true aim was to let us see his might.”

Having said that, he paused momentarily before continuing, “That aside, he’s able to predict everything so precisely and no development seems to be beyond his expectations. He must be familiar with the past and the future. Perhaps...”

He hesitated for a bit before finishing his sentence, “What if He can

see what we are plotting here?”

“Nonsense! This is just alarmist talk! You’re really something, Amon,” Agarthare rebutted angrily. Then he pointed at the massive inverted tree and cursed loudly, “You are helping him inflate his notoriety and destroying your own dignity. Also, can I take your words as disrespect to the witch of the tree?!”

Amon just shrugged and sneered, about to retort when Barr interrupted him.

“Enough arguing. Are you two trying to affect the mother of Norzin, who fights the Wall of Fog alone, and the great witch of the tree who protects all of Norzin—Fraxinus, who is sleeping?”

Barr’s words shut the quibbling two up, and they fell into a sullen silence.

Barr sighed and walked toward the fruit that was hanging from the tree, and everyone followed him respectfully.

“No matter what, engaging in war with him now is impossible. The gray fog has already started to spread when the Path of the Flaming Sword pried open the dream fissure, and even Norzin is in danger. We wait for the time being. When the Path of Flaming Sword makes a move, we sit back and reap the benefits.

“Just that, at that time, we’ll have no choice but to disturb the long slumber of the witch Fraxinus.” Barr walked over to the man-sized fruit. Toward the top of the fruit was a transparent window, and he looked in from the outside—

A girl with turquoise hair and a gorgeous face like an angel was lying naked in the center. Her skin was fair and fragile, but there were some turquoise branches growing on her, making her even more beautiful.

From a certain point of view, the witch of the Fraxinus tree was the source of power for all of Norzin’s constructs and shelter. Norzin was like a fetus in her stomach, constantly absorbing her nutrients.

Her long green eyelashes fluttered slightly, as if she was having a

long dream. There was a slight curve at the corners of her beautiful face, making it seem as if she was a young girl.

Chapter 408: Monument Of Fire, Wedge Of Life

“Haa, Norzin’s industrial pollution is really getting worse...”

As usual, Lin Jie woke up early and opened the bookstore door, feeling slightly giddy as he saw the thick fog outside.

The sun hadn’t been visible for a few days in a row, but Lin Jie didn’t mind. He had been an otaku for more than 20 years in the 21st century. After coming to Norzin, he could use the heavy smog as an excuse to stay at home.

However, the fog today was really too thick, reaching the point where it would be impossible to distinguish the gender of a person standing three meters away.

The rising fog moved slowly along the ground like the hems of a flowing white dress, making it seem as if it were alive.

Lin Jie looked out through the open door of the shop, the thick fog reminded him of Earth’s ‘City of Fog.’ (T/L note: Most likely referring to London)

The bookstore was empty and quiet. Mu’en had already gone to the branch in the Central District, and Joseph had gone to get material and tools needed for the new store. Only Lin Jie was left alone in the empty bookstore.

Lin Jie had been very curious about Joseph’s display of extraordinary power previously. Unfortunately, both Mu’en and Joseph had been very busy, so he couldn’t sit down and talk to them.

Once Mu’en fully sets up the branch in the Central District, Joseph, who has retired, would be my new assistant in the old bookstore. I should have lots of time to ask him then... Lin Jie thought to himself before picking up a book from the bookshelf and flipping through it.

However, to his surprise, he had actually read this book before.

“Strange... Books taken from the bookshelves at random shouldn’t be repeated. This is the whole Earth’s entire library.”

Lin Jie didn’t believe it and drew a few more books from the shelves, but found that this was the same case.

He had read each of these books and knew what would appear on the next page.

A scary but reasonable thought came into his mind. *Could it be that the books aren’t repeating, but it’s because I’ve already read all the books?*

That’s impossible!

It’s supposed to be all the books of Earth. How could I have finished reading all of it in three years. Surely, Blackie has made a mistake.

“Mm... Looks like I have to make time and ask Blackie, otherwise the days ahead would be so boring.” Lin Jie nodded and put the books back.

Then Lin Jie frowned as he realized that the sun wasn’t out yet despite it being early morning. The fog hadn’t yet gone away and had instead gotten even thicker. It even wafted into the bookstore through the open door.

At this moment, when he gazed outside again, the fog was like a thick gray barrier which he could barely see past.

Sigh... It seems like I won’t be able to open shop today.. . Lin Jie put down the book and walked to the newly installed shutter gate. He reached out and pulled the gate down hard, causing it to rattle.

Then—

A black gloved hand, slightly larger than a normal person’s, reached out just as the shutter gate was almost closed and halted it from closing fully. He was so strong that Lin Jie had to stop in case an accident happened.

The shutter gate was opened once more.

Lin Jie then saw a bulky figure in a black cloak standing at the door.

His entire face was completely shrouded by darkness, and not a single feature could be seen. There was some wet mist on his cloak, and he held a box in his hand.

He was also a head taller than Lin Jie, and his large muscles were vaguely discernible beneath the cloak. This person had unusually thick hands, and his frame seemed even bulkier than Joseph's.

However, his hands were trembling slightly, and he actually seemed somewhat nervous and polite.

"It's so foggy today," Lin Jie was a little surprised and said, "I thought I wouldn't have any customers today, but then you came. Are you here to take a look at some books?"

The robed man shook his head and said, "I apologize for keeping you waiting. It's impolite for us to come to you today."

The robed man's physique was unbelievably strong. Just a few days ago, he had crushed a living person with his bare hands, but now, he was standing meekly beside Lin Jie like a primary school student.

After he came up from the Lower District and obtained the book after killing Humphrey, he had returned to the Lower District to offer it up to the higher-ups of his faith. At that moment, they reckoned that this was the beginning of beginnings, master of all things, originator of chaos and order that they were waiting for, and the source of it all was the master of this book.

Thus, he came back to the surface and found his way to the bookstore owner.

"Oh?" Lin Jie raised an eyebrow. "So, I'm assuming that you've heard of me? And you came specially for me?"

He then continued jokingly, "Actually, it's not that long. Time

always flies when I'm reading. Come on in."

...Indeed, perhaps the change of eras is as simple as flipping the page of a book to this being.

Fortunately, after many thousands of years, ever since the First Era, where humans didn't even exist, they had finally found the master that they had been waiting to serve.

Evidently, the robed man didn't dare disobey Lin Jie's orders and entered the bookstore at once. Despite being big and scary-looking, he seemed rather uneasy.

Lin Jie closed the shutter gate and noticed the details on the black robe—a gray sigil, consisting of a withered tree and two crossed swords.

"The Church of Pestilence?"

"Yes." The man in black robes nodded.

Lin Jie returned behind the counter and crossed his arms. With a strange expression, he leaned forward. "It seems like you made a rather determined effort, seeing that you've come looking for me."

Lin Jie had been researching the Lower District and the Church of Pestilence, but he had never obtained much accurate information.

The reason was that the Upper and Lower District were separated completely, and moving between the two was prohibited.

Yet, this mysterious man in black robes was actually from the Church of Pestilence.

In other words, he had actually crossed the barrier between the Upper and Lower Districts! It had to be said that this was simply astonishing... In a way, it made sense for him to be in such a black robe that concealed his identity.

The man in black robes trembled with excitement when he heard this.

That's right. After receiving the Lord's guidance, he had made two very dangerous back and forth trips from the Lower District to the Upper District. It was also due to a few days worth of effort from his people and the higher-ups of the church to cast a spell that released such a huge amount of fog from the original passageway to stop transcendent beings from investigating. All of this had been done just so he could reach Boss Lin's bookstore safely.

At this moment, he really wanted to tell everyone from the church in the Lower District that all their efforts weren't in vain.

Boss Lin was all-knowing!

"I came here solely because of your guidance," the robed man said nervously. Then, he drew out a book from within his black robes.

Lin Jie glanced at it. The title read ***Myths & Legends*** .

"Eh?" *Isn't this the book I gave to Ji Bonong?*

Lin Jie had given Ji Bonong five books, and one of them, ***Myths & Legends*** , was his own work.

Speaking of which, it was embarrassing to think that he had shamelessly mixed in such a book that no one might like in which might affect Ji Bonong's sales. Lin Jie actually felt slightly bad about it.

However, he never expected that a reader would actually obtain this book and seek him out for a discussion.

The main contents of the book, ***Myths & Legends***, was a rather dry discussion that originated from ancient mythological human civilizations. It could be considered an archaeological book, so could the robed man before him be an archaeologist? So, that's why he was interested?

The robed man caressed the book carefully. In the shadows of his hood that Lin Jie couldn't see, he revealed a sinister and crazed smile as the tentacles on his chin wriggled. The title on the book he held read ***Dream of Chaos*** .

Lin Jie couldn't help but smile. "You got this book from Ji Bonong's auction! Looks like you really like this book and have unique insight."

"It's more than just liking... This is a book that only a true god can write!" The robed man's hoarse voice was slightly fanatical as he clutched the book tightly in his arms.

"Ha-ha-ha, this praise is too exaggerated."

...But I like it very much. Praise it more, praise me more.

While the books he recommended or gave were the works of others, this was the first time someone had come to discuss Lin Jie's book with him. Moreover, this was a compliment from a fellow academic and made it even more precious.

"Speaking of which, I've always been interested in the opinions of others." Lin Jie folded his arms and smiled. "What do you think of this book?"

The robed man answered in a shaky voice, "Beautiful, dreamy, and unbelievable. The contents are difficult to comprehend, but it intoxicates the reader. It's like seeing another unbelievable world that transcends the limits of space and time!"

His burning gaze was faintly discernible under the black robe. "It isn't just me. Everyone in the church looks forward to it!"

Lin Jie nodded in understanding. It seemed like this was indeed a fellow academic. "Your church? Looks like you all had a good discussion on this book, heh."

"Yes, yes, it means a lot to us." The robed man nodded vigorously. "That's why my church members asked me to bring gifts as gratitude when I came to visit."

With that, he slowly pushed the box in his hand across the counter to Lin Jie.

"Ahh, your visit is more than enough. There's no need for such formalities! How can an academic discussion warrant all these..."

Although Lin Jie spoke modestly, he had already opened the box. What was inside made the look on his face change. His eyes narrowed, and he immediately switched from business mode to work mode.

The thing inside wasn't gold nor jewels but a fragment instead.

This fragment appeared very familiar to Lin Jie because he had one that was identical.

Back when Ji Zhixiu had come to propose a partnership, amongst the gifts she had presented was one fragment. A relic unearthed from the Lower District.

And now, this visitor had actually brought him a second piece!

The Church of Pestilence isn't just interested in mythology and literature, but they are also rather capable at archaeology in the Lower District...

Lin Jie was certain that the robed man was in a job that involved archaeology.

Perhaps he heard that Lin Jie was researching this and came to discuss it?

"Do you know the origin of this fragment?" Lin Jie frowned slightly as he asked. At the same time, he took out the other fragment and put the two pieces together.

Finally, those broken and indecipherable characters could be slightly made out.

The robed man immediately lowered his head and said deferentially, "I'm not very sure. We can't understand the words on it, but this fragment contains an ancient soul."

"An ancient soul? That's indeed the case. Time carries the spirit of all things that have existed. These items that have come from ancient times naturally carry the air of that ancient time."

Lin Jie fiddled with the fragments and picked it up. "The characters on it mean 'Monument of Fire, Wedge of Life.'"

Narrowing his eyes, he continued, “Perhaps you don’t understand. In other words, this is a token of a witch named ‘Life.’”

Chapter 409: Invitation

The moment Lin Jie said that, the black-robed man trembled as if he had just learned a shocking secret.

The Witch of Life?

Isn't that one of the Four Primordial Witches?!

In fact, in the legends of Norzin, the Witch of Life was the first of the Primordial Witches to fall and dissipate, or rather, to completely leave the continent of Azir and fall into slumber within the dream realm.

However, the theory of the Witch of Life's fall wasn't accepted by most. After all, the witches came from chaos and were so powerful, so how could they die?

Thus, many said that the Witch of Life hadn't perished. Instead, she had merely scattered her tokens around, waiting for an opportunity to resurrect and resist the darkness that had never dissipated.

So, could this fragment before him contained a powerful force and a wisp of the ancient soul belonging to the Witch of Life?!

For a moment, the man in black robes nearly forgot his reverence toward Lin Jie.

However, he came back to his senses and started wondering whether he should be rejoicing for sacrificing the right thing or not.

After all, it was said that the Witch of Life was most resistant to the darkness and loathed it. She had once gathered a bonfire boundary which linked life and destruction to provide a shelter for humans to resist the darkness and false gods.

In other words... this witch was an enemy.

While the robed man was deep in thought, Lin Jie took out a magnifying glass from the counter drawer and carefully observed

the patterns on the fragment. Once he entered work mode, Boss Lin was quite reliable. After all, this was a part of his old profession.

“As expected of you. Seeing through these false disguises so easily,” the robed man praised cautiously.

This witch actually dared disguise her aura and give herself an opportunity to be resurrected. She set up a net of destiny, hoping to return to the human world one day. Unfortunately, these arrangements had probably been seen through by the great existence before the robed man.

Lin Jie waved it off and remarked casually, “It’s not a disguise. How can this even be considered a disguise.”

Although few people would recognize the characters, it was just difficult to piece together and there wasn’t any additional encryption.

That’s right. Ridiculous. Just ridiculous. How can this even be considered a disguise in front of Boss Lin... The robed man ridiculed in silence. What Primordial Witch? What Ancient Soul. All of which is just being toyed casually by Boss Lin now.

“Why I’m able to tell that this is the Witch of Life’s token is all thanks to a friend.”

“Friend?” the robed man blurted out. He was just surprised that the true god actually had friends, but he knew that he had gone overboard immediately after asking.

However, Lin Jie pondered for a moment, *Silver and I can be considered friends, right? Or do we have a closer relationship than that? Never mind, it’s better to be more conservative till I’m reunited with her.*

“Ah, a friend of mine, Silver,” Lin Jie said. “I heard some things about the Witch of Life from her.”

Silver?!!!

The Witch of Snow, one of the four Primordial Witches?

The robed man gulped. His tentacles would squirm non-stop once he became nervous and nearly peeked out from beneath his black hood. Realizing that, he quickly pulled his hood tighter.

It was reasonable for the Silver Witch and Boss Lin to be friends. The Silver Witch was different from the Witch of Life and the Witch of the Night. She was the leader of the dragons and elves and the guardian of all mythical creatures.

She loathed lowly, evil, and greedy humans and would even punish them.

The robed man subconsciously stroked the tentacles on his jaw while in thought. *I, as well as the hardworking and brave people of the Lower District, have ceased to be humans since a long time ago. Moreover, we are always oppressed and exploited by these weak, lowly, and arrogant humans of the Upper District.*

Everyone in the Lower District has toiled for the trash humans of the Upper District from the moment we are born. Though I have long heard from the bishop of the Church of Pestilence that we have always been oppressed, I learned that this truth was way more exaggerated and frightening than what the bishop said in my two trips up to the surface.

Now, we should receive the protection of Boss Lin and the Silver Witch, so it's time these damned lowly humans pay the price.

“Alright.” Lin Jie put down the magnifying glass in his hand. “From the broken fragment of this stone tablet and the other piece, given by my friend, I deduce that there should be a total of three fragments.

“There’s still one that’s missing. Based on the information, it should be an anchor point left behind by the Witch of Life. As for what this stone tablet does, I’m afraid we’ll have to gather all three pieces to know.”

“Rest assured, Boss Lin. The Church of Pestilence will gather the strength of all our believers to find the third fragment for you,” the robed man expressed his determination at once.

“It’s merely a slight thought I had, why trouble everyone and mobilize so many?” asked Lin Jie earnestly.

Judging from this visitor’s attitude, the last fragment could probably greatly advance the historical research of Norzin. It was natural for Lin Jie to be excited, but he had to be polite and modest as well.

The Witch of Life is just a mere slight thought! As expected of Boss Lin!

“No, no. We can never reply to your help. Your will is ours,” said the robed man as he pressed ***Myths and Legends*** tightly against his chest as if he was offering his heart.

Seems like this book was really helpful to the archaeologists of the Church of Pestilence. In that case, I won’t stand on ceremony... Thus, Lin Jie nodded. “I’ll leave it to you.”

The robed man felt that his own existence had been acknowledged and was so excited that the tentacles on his lower jaw wiggled energetically in the shadow of his hood.

He couldn’t help feeling a little floaty when he saw Boss Lin’s encouraging smile. But after a moment, he remembered something he had almost forgotten.

“There’s one more thing I need to inform you about,” said the black-robed man earnestly. “Our cooperation with the Ash Chamber of Commerce has resulted in the opening of another path to the Lower District.

“We hope that you can come visit the Lower District as soon as possible. Everyone in the Lower District has paid a high price for this.”

“So it was thanks to the help of you people...” Lin Jie was slightly surprised.

He had heard of the Ash Chamber of Commerce opening the second passageway from Cherry.

He remembered that there was only one road to the Lower District

originally, which was controlled by Rolle Resource. Previously, he had complained about why the government hadn't built a few more passages, but later on, he thought that paths to the Lower District might have been too difficult to construct.

But now, the largest church in the Lower District had actually opened up a second path on its own and was very happy to have obtained knowledge.

It made Lin Jie feel touched! This was the power of knowledge!

Lin Jie picked up the visitor's gloved hands and shook them. "I'm very touched. I had originally intended to head to the Lower District, but now, I'll definitely go!"

The robed man nearly suffocated from holding his breath when he saw his hand being held by the one he worshiped. However, he still managed to calm his breathing and said, "Thank you. We've been waiting for you for far too long!"

Lin Jie nodded and let go of the hand. "I'll find some time to go have a look around. But in the meantime, don't forget to continue reading my book."

Lin Jie pointed at ***Myths & Legends*** and continued without breaking his stride, "I put in a lot of effort into this book, so it's best if everyone can read it."

The robed man was stunned for a moment before he gazed down at ***Dream of Chaos*** in his hands.

This book contained extreme power. Most ordinary Lower District residents that couldn't withstand this power would lose their lives or turn mad after reading it. Therefore, the Church of Pestilence's bishop had listed it as the highest of scriptures. Ordinary people couldn't read it haphazardly, yet Boss Lin wanted everyone to do so?

"By the way," Lin Jie asked with a straight face, "do you all have printing equipment there?"

"Umm, yes."

“Then that’s even better. Reprint hundreds of copies of this book and distribute one to everyone so they can all read it.”

“Re-re-reprint?”

“That’s right,” Lin Jie said matter-of-factly. “Actually, I tried to make this book as easy to understand as possible so that the public can experience the joys of knowledge.”

The robed man gulped. While this book would cause many Lower District residents to lose their lives, not everyone would die. Once they survived, they would obtain great power and become purest believers of Boss Lin, like himself!

I understand now... The robed man came to the understanding that Boss Lin wanted to choose powerful and pure believers through this book!

I see now! I see now!

The robed man could not help but lament the cruelty and benevolence of this True God.

The Witch of the Night and the Witch of Life protected all humans regardless of their characters, allowing many cancerous tumors to reproduce and fester. Compared to their hypocritical approach, Boss Lin’s methods were truly benevolent!

It seemed cruel, but was, in fact, eternal!

“I understand. I’ll convey your intentions to everyone. You’re really generous!” praised the man before he took the book with him and made the return journey.

Lin Jie watched him head into the thick fog and waved his hands in satisfaction.

Chapter 410: That Bookstore Owner Isn't That Strong

Michael pulled down his hood as he faced the endless dark blue sea. Wind blew his hat loose, and his golden hair fell out, making it appear even more dazzling under the red sunset.

His feet threaded lightly on the golden beach as the reddish-yellow rays reflected on his face.

This was a void domain created by the sovereign who had claimed the void as his own territory as well as the most powerful black magician at present—Zaphkiel.

Even Michael couldn't help being in awe at the one who ruled the void. Everything in the world first came from the void. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that Zaphkiel was the master of all things.

After all, there was nothing more permanent than the nothingness of the Void. Eternity was just but nothingness...

Michael once had a total of nine companions like Zaphkiel. He thought he might be able to fulfill his dream by gathering the ten that possessed the power to shape the world.

After all, concepts of 'eternity' to these nine were as simple as eating to humans.

However...

Michael sat down on a rock that had been eroded by waves as he gazed out at the boundless sea, lost in thought.

However, four of his nine companions had already fallen in succession, and the one who had taken them down was just a mere fellow who self-proclaimed himself as a bookstore owner.

The founding members of the Path of the Flaming Sword were all

ancient Supreme-rank beings that had existed for ages. Their level of mysticism had long surpassed 99% of transcendent beings in the world. Yet now, they were like droplets of water in a funnel, gravitating toward the hole in the center—the bookstore owner.

Boss... Lin, huh?

Bookstore owner, what sort of frightening existence are you? What's the reason for you to oppose me at every turn? What exactly is your goal?

Faint silhouettes gradually took shape in the emptiness as Michael lost himself in thought.

Michael stood up from the rock and readjusted his white robe. Ignoring the sea breeze rustling it, he held the red cross in his hand like a walking stick in front of him. He walked barefoot on the sandbank while the waves constantly kissed his feet.

The Path of the Flaming Sword had finally convened.

The first shadowy silhouette, Zaphkiel, was the first to speak, “Michael, I’ve brought all the members who were available.”

Although the Path of the Flaming Sword had gathered before, it was rare for everyone to come together in such a complete manner. Most of the time, they relied on Sandalphon to pass messages between them, but sadly, Sandalphon had already died.

Since his conversation with the Giant King, Augustus, Michael had decided to change the Path of the Flaming Sword’s habit of working scattered and individually into concentrating their efforts on eliminating Boss Lin.

In his eyes, Boss Lin had become an insurmountable obstacle and a presence he had to overcome. Although he had not fully experienced the bookstore owner’s strength, Michael’s intuition told him his dream would be within reach if he could defeat this bookstore owner.

Michael surveyed the various silhouette forms, who were the most remarkable transcendent beings in the world. To them, humans were like mere insects, and it was simply ridiculous for them to

assume human form.

Moreover, many of them were far away from humans and could not understand human aesthetics and postures. Forcibly transforming into human form would only make them even more unpredictable.

In comparison, Michael had a good understanding of human aesthetics.

Michael silently recited the names of these various silhouettes in his heart. Suddenly, he noticed an unfamiliar humanoid form at the end, resembling a young man but with a familiar aura.

“Haniel?” Michael called out this name in bewilderment, because the aura of this silhouette was very similar to that of the being who controlled time. “Is this your new form? I thought you were dead. That’s great!”

Before the young man’s phantom silhouette could speak, another large silhouette spoke up, “Haniel had a great battle with the bookstore owner and was accidentally involved in the battle at 67th Avenue. All of which I observed clearly.”

“But I still found Haniel,” Zaphkiel, who appeared like an old man in a tattered robe, suddenly spoke. “With the help of a spy controlled by Raziel, she was resurrected.”

“Is that so?” Michael frowned, feeling somewhat skeptical.

“Yes,” ‘Haniel’ spoke. “The puppet used by Raziel as an experiment, named Fitch, was used by me as a vessel.” With that, ‘Haniel’ raised his hand, and his arm, which was previously a mere silhouette, began to take shape.

His arm was like countless rays materializing, refracting countless unimaginable colors as if made of unbreakable glass that was shattered and yet unbreakable.

Gradually, a small worm emerged from the palm of his hand, and Michael immediately sensed its aura. There was a worm with the essence of time, and all of Michael’s doubts disappeared.

“Ah, you never cease to amaze me,” Michael couldn’t help but smile, his gloomy state of mind while he had been facing the sea at sunset now vanished. “I never expected that you would escape from the bookstore owner.”

“Hmm?” Suddenly, a slender and lanky silhouette raised a voice of doubt. “Did I hear you correctly, Michael? You just said ‘escape from that bookstore owner.’”

Michael remained silent in the face of this inquiry.

“Haniel controls the Law of time, which is undoubtedly a law that is unbeatable that even I, Zadkiel, have to admit. Yet, you say ‘escaped’?!”

The lanky being, Zadkiel, had the form of a slender gentleman with a tall hat and cane, just that his body was several meters tall.

He had a rather profound gaze on right now as he pressed further, “Is that bookstore owner really that strong?”

His eyes didn’t show fear but instead glowed with a strange glint.

Michael couldn’t help but sigh, seeing his compatriot’s nonchalant attitude toward the bookstore owner. Then he said, “It’s not about whether he’s strong or not. I had a brief encounter with him...”

“That bookstore owner isn’t that strong!” Haniel, who had been silent all this while, suddenly interrupted Michael, causing everyone’s attention to shift toward him.

“I’ve gone up against that boss before, and while he’s certainly strong, he’s not that strong,” Haniel said with some dissatisfaction. “Saying that I managed to escape is severely underestimating me, Michael!”

Michael frowned, then responded, “But Raziel and Sandalphon fell at his hands.”

Raziel’s betrayal wasn’t as simple as things appeared to them. The real Raziel was long dead, and the current Raziel was just a puppet whose will had been devoured.

“That was because of the witch who was by his side, Walpurgis who controls the night. She killed Sandalphon and devoured Raziel’s will.

“When I fought him, I was able to retreat unscathed, just like you did when you fought him, Michael. If he’s really that powerful, why didn’t he kill you then?” said Haniel confidently.

Haniel’s words made the other members of the Path of the Flaming Sword nod in agreement. Seeing Michael still having doubts, Haniel raised an eyebrow and said, “There’s no use worrying about how strong he is now, is there? Even if he’s stronger, we still have to beat him.

“The fall of Raziel and Sandalphon should give us a big hint that while he’s definitely strong, he’s not strong enough to defeat us when we’re united. That’s why he’s trying to take us down separately, isn’t that so?

“In other words, as long as we’re willing to combine our strengths, that bookstore owner isn’t that scary! Isn’t that why you came to us, Michael?”

Michael pondered for a while and nodded. “You’re right.”

Chapter 411: Nothing To Fear!

Fitch breathed a sigh of relief when he saw Michael nod.

Since Ji Zhixiu's birthday banquet, at the time Haniel was severely injured by Boss Lin and the Chronos Butterfly imploded, Fitch, due to the modifications that Raziel had previously done to him, became the most suitable vessel. It was also these serious injuries inflicted by Boss Lin onto Haniel that allowed Fitch to assess Haniel's memories.

And Fitch, who had gained Haniel's memories, naturally assumed Haniel's aura and identity as well.

Just gaining that identity alone wasn't enough. Those Clock-wheel Worms that roamed countless timelines sensed Haniel's aura in the absence of a leader and thus submitted to Fitch. Now, Fitch had completely become 'Haniel.'

Fitch had seen a large amount of Haniel's memories, including her memories as a Clock-wheel Worm, the memory of joining the Path of the Flaming Sword, and the memories of slaughtering humans and manipulating time.

Fitch, who had assimilated everything, was now at a loss, for he had previously just been a nameless experimental subject of the Path of the Flaming Sword. He was someone that could be discarded at any time, yet overnight, he had gained fearsome transcendent abilities that could surpass the current dimensions.

Fitch recalled the book Lin Jie had previously given him— ***Nest of Malevolent Chaos*** .

Why had Boss Lin given him a book to such an insignificant person like himself? It was known that people with great repute like Ji Bonong, Wilde, and Joseph... paid a high price to obtain a book, so Fitch wondered why he had gotten one for himself that easily.

What can I give in return?! Fitch was deep in thought.

However, he had already assumed Haniel's identity and had begun trying to manipulate time. When he browsed through the past, he was shocked.

Perhaps this is Boss Lin's intention!

On the one hand, he got Joseph and Wilde to fight, yet nonchalantly brought the Clock-wheel Worm to Ji Zhixiu's banquet for two reasons. First, was to manipulate time and decide the outcome of the battle between Joseph and Wilde from afar. Second, was to draw Haniel over.

On the other hand, despite Haniel being so blatantly disrespectful to him, Boss Lin didn't kill her but left her hanging on for dear life. There are two objectives for this as well. The first was to have Haniel affect the battle between Joseph and Wilde after the reversal of time to tilt the outcome.

And the second objective was... me!

Speaking to such an ordinary and insignificant person like me at the beginning, giving me a book, and providing guidance... All of this was done preemptively, because he had seen that I could serve as Haniel's vessel and infiltrate into the Path of the Flaming Sword's inner circle! It's all to lay the groundwork for destroying the Path of the Flaming Sword!

*No wonder the book he gave me is titled **Nest of Malevolent Chaos** . It's for the sake of provoking evil thoughts and stirring up strife to lead the Path of the Flaming Sword that just aligned together toward its death!*

The battle between Joseph and Wilde wasn't just a frivolous whim of a divine entity — it was a threat to deter the Path of the Flaming Sword and the central administration!

It is to tell everyone that the true god has returned!

Boss Lin's scheme is simply a series of intertwined plans within plans, lacking any loopholes. If he hadn't already seen the past and future as an omniscient master, how could he have made the whole of Norzin dance in the palm of his hand?

Fitch, who reckoned he had figured it all out, was sweating

profusely. His legs were trembling, on the verge of buckling. He couldn't help being in awe and admiration at Boss's Lin's might.

Moreover, Boss Lin wouldn't take the initiative to act since he was so benevolent. Therefore, Fitch's task right now was to instigate the Path of the Flaming Sword to anger Boss Lin so that 'He' could eliminate all these cancerous tumors.

Fitch was confident that his conjecture was correct, and as expected, Zaphkiel, who replaced Sandalphon as the new liaison of the Path of the Flaming Sword, found him and invited him to this first united gathering of the founding members of the Path of the Flaming Sword.

Far away, in the void space constructed by Zaphkiel that made it impossible to distinguish reality from fantasy, the sea breeze blowing on Michael's face made him sober up a little. He had gotten a little hotheaded after hearing the urging from 'Haniel,' but he quickly calmed himself down.

Michael said in earnest, "Haniel, if your information is indeed accurate, then we should unite and take action. What do you think our chances of winning are?" Michael had a thorough understanding of human aesthetics, but unfortunately, his beautiful face was striking beyond the ordinary thresholds of human aesthetics that it appeared somewhat oppressive.

Fitch, who had gained Haniel's memories, easily assumed Haniel's arrogant personality. Moreover, he had been the only one to survive after clashing with the bookstore owner, so he had great credibility.

"A hundred percent!" he affirmed. "Boss Lin is nothing to be feared!"

Michael fell silent.

"But," Fitch continued when he noticed Michael was still indecisive, "do you all know about Raziel's situation?"

"Yes," Metatron, who was like a huge mass of cotton floating in the air, spoke up. "From my observations, Raziel has completely

severed all connections with the Path of the Flaming Sword. I wasn't able to clearly see what the bookstore owner did to Raziel, but Raziel's logical thought has already ceased."

"He can be regarded as dead, but he is still working at the Truth Union," said Metatron doubtfully. "It's hard to imagine why the strongest mind in this world would stop thinking."

"So, the bookstore owner has a way to control people. Since he's able to manipulate Raziel, we can naturally assume that he has the ability to manipulate anyone that has come in contact with him. Perhaps there might be a mole among us!"

Michael's eyes narrowed. "Are you suggesting that you might be one?"

Fitch didn't flinch and instead revealed a provocative expression. "Of course, all of you can suspect me, but I reckon that, now that the enemy is at the gate, those who are still hesitating are more likely to be the traitors."

"Michael, it's unlike you to be so indecisive. Perhaps you've already been altered by the bookstore owner?" said the tall, lanky Zadkiel.

"Nonsense!" Michael glared at him, but Zadkiel didn't get mad and instead let out a throaty laugh.

Fitch didn't say anything more. *Nest of Malevolent Chaos* had been given to him by Boss Lin because it granted him the ability to incite evil and strife. Conflicts would automatically arise when everyone had doubts.

"Now, Michael, will you give the order? We won't succeed in our goal if we don't get rid of the bookstore owner," said Zaphkiel.

"My line of thought is that it is impossible for the Central District not to know about Joseph and Wilde's battle. We first wait for those old things in the Central District's central administration to make their move so we can see Lin Jie's true power.

"Even we can beat those bunch of old things in the Central District. They are just an arrogant bunch that lean on the achievements of

their forebears. They wouldn't even be a match for this Boss Lin, and it would just be giving that bookstore owner a chance for more preparation."

"We cannot afford to wait," said Fitch.

The seeds of "Nest of Malevolent Chaos" had been completely sown. Now they were beginning to take root and sprout.

"Or should I say," Fitch tilted his head and continued, "you don't care how many of my kind I sacrifice just to escape and merely see us as tools."

"What are you trying to say, Haniel!" Michael raised the red cross in his hand and pointed it at Fitch, exclaiming, "I see you all as compatriots, and we have a common ideal, don't we?"

But in truth, Fitch hadn't been wrong. Michael didn't care whether his fellow angels lived or died, like Raziel or Sandalphon. All he wanted was to reach the dream realm.

But when Fitch said it so bluntly, he had no choice but to deny it with all his might.

"Then go and avenge me and seek redress for everyone!" Once Fitch finished saying that, the other silent compatriots nodded in agreement.

This time, it seemed as if Michael was walking on a thin tightrope.

Each of these members of the Path of the Flaming Sword was incredibly powerful, and it wasn't easy to unite them. That was why the Path of the Flaming Sword's founding members had always operated on their own.

Also, Haniel's personality had always been vile and arrogant, so Michael didn't suspect anything was off from 'Haniel's' instigations.

Michael was no ordinary existence, for he was able to lead the whole Path of the Flaming Sword, and he knew that even if he refused this time, everyone would still probably agree, although the seed of rebellion would probably have been sown.

Although he was still hesitant and doubtful, Michael clenched his fist and sighed inwardly. He made a decision, gazed at his compatriots, and said, “In that case, let’s find an opportunity to strike the bookstore together.”

Chapter 412: Old Wil Died?

After the thick white fog had dissipated, Melissa gazed at 23rd Avenue and sighed... That was where the bookstore that changed her destiny was situated.

She wore a long leather coat, and her clothes rustled as the desolate wind blew.

Melissa keenly sensed that the sudden white fog wasn't formed naturally but resulting from some power of a strong transcendent being.

When she was walking along 27th Avenue, she spotted a black-robed figure hurrying out of the bookstore while clutching a book tightly.

Now she was certain that this thick fog wasn't naturally formed; rather, caused by that black-robed figure—

A new bookstore customer? she wondered.

At the thought of this, Melissa's heart started to ache. A sense of detachment, as if time had moved on, swept over her—new customers had arrived, and old ones were leaving for good.

Her fiery red hair was no longer tied high in a ponytail but cut short. Her hands were stuffed in the pockets of her red leather coat, and her expression was no longer as lively as before. It was as if she had aged ten years overnight.

Ever since the battle at 67th Avenue, she had used the books once given to her by the bookstore owner to achieve extraordinary learning speeds that allowed her to surpass rank boundaries and comprehend Supreme-rank power. She had ascended to Destructive-rank and had already gained a partial grasp of Laws. At this point, she had scaled to heights that her peers would never reach.

...Or perhaps, even higher.

However, the price she paid was that she lost her father forever.

Secret Rite Tower had once again recognized her as a family member of a martyr and offered her the opportunity to become a senior executive while at the same time affirming her talent and potential.

Melissa smiled bitterly. She never imagined she would twice have family become martyrs.

She sighed softly. The grief she felt after hearing from Uncle Winston that her father had died had gradually turned into numbness. She clenched her fists and walked toward the bookstore.

The confusion felt like a shackle that hung around her neck, and it was a shackle she had put on herself as if she was heading toward the gallows every day... Perhaps she should seek revenge, but who should she enact her revenge on?

Winston had said that Wilde and her father perished together, and that had perhaps been the best outcome.

Melissa was in pain and at a loss. She didn't know what to do and unknowingly headed to 23rd Avenue. When the fog fully cleared, she found herself standing in front of the bookstore.

Now, she really had no face to see Mr. Lin. After all, the bookstore owner had already given her a chance—reversing time to take control of the battlefield. He had given Melissa and her father a chance, yet they had still failed.

She headed into the bookstore slowly. At the very least, she had to apologize to Boss Lin.

Lin Jie was gently setting down the gift from the black-robed man when he sensed it seemed like a customer had arrived and couldn't help but exclaim in surprise. It was such a foggy day, yet there were actually two customers today.

He looked up eagerly and saw a familiar face.

Ah! Melissa?!

Lin Jie nearly dropped Life's stone fragment.

His highly intelligent brain began to spin rapidly, and he immediately wondered if Melissa had come looking for Joseph.

However, Joseph had said before that he couldn't tell Melissa he was still alive.

While Lin Jie didn't really understand this sort of educational style Joseph used on his daughter, Melissa did indeed seem to have grown a lot.

Lin Jie scrutinized Melissa from top to toe. Indeed, this child seems to have grown in various aspects. *Even her style of dressing is more mature now...*

"Melissa, you finally returned," Lin Jie greeted his young customer nonchalantly.

"...Boss Lin." Melissa lowered her head. Her once flamboyant, flowing red hair was now short and flattened. "I'm sorry," said the girl hoarsely.

Ah? Why are you apologizing to me? Lin Jie's brows were furrowed as he pondered, seemingly distressed at this formerly mischievous brat.

Could it be that she's really grown up that quickly? She already understands her previous interaction with me—challenging me to arm wrestle—was childish behavior and that it showed a lack of respect for me, a respected(self-proclaimed) bookstore owner?

Hasn't she matured a little too fast?!

Lin Jie was taken aback.

Melissa cautiously raised her head and peeked at Lin Jie. Upon seeing his strict face, and getting no response, Melissa couldn't tell whether the bookstore owner forgave her or not.

She hadn't been able to protect her father and help him escape that massive battle even though she had gotten the help of the bookstore

owner. This probably disappointed Boss Lin, and she ought to apologize.

“At least... at least Wilde is dead,” Melissa raised her head and said with slightly more determination.

“Ah? Old Wil died?” Lin Jie was thoroughly shocked. “Who told you that?”

Hmm? Melissa’s eyes widened, and she was equally as confused as Lin Jie.

“N-no...?” Melissa had originally been guilt stricken. In her eyes, the intensity of the battle at 67th Avenue was far too brutal for a child like herself to bear, especially the final clash between Supreme-ranks. At that time, she hadn’t personally witnessed Wilde dying.

To be precise, no one did. Not even Joseph.

Did Wilde really die...? That black magician was extremely crafty, and having not seen his corpse, Melissa couldn’t be entirely sure.

“I don’t know if he’s dead or alive. I just wanted to confirm it,” said Lin Jie in earnest.

Melissa: “...”

“Never mind, let’s not talk about that now,” Lin Jie said, frowning as he put down what he was holding.

To be honest, even though Wilde committed atrocities and joined a cult, he didn’t hurt anyone and was actually quite a good person. He shouldn’t have died, right? Besides, it’s weird to discuss whether someone is alive or not here...

Even if Wilde was all that, he had given Lin Jie gifts, helped with his business, and could be considered a friend. A friend dying just like this wasn’t something that Lin Jie could believe easily.

Lin Jie cleared his throat and asked, “Have you come to see me because of what happened to your father?”

Melissa was still in shock about the fact that Wilde hadn't been eliminated yet. *Is Mr. Lin asking me to check Wilde's mortality? Is he implying that Wilde is still alive?!*

Melissa clenched her fists so tightly that her nails nearly embedded themselves in the flesh of her palms. She was having difficulty breathing as an indescribable storm surged through her mind—she couldn't accept the fact that Wilde was still alive.

"I know about what happened to your father, but I hope you can move on from the sadness, because you have a greater responsibility awaiting you," Lin Jie consoled the young redhead. "What's most important is to let the departed see your growth so that they can rest in peace."

Melissa glanced up, putting aside the fact that Wilde was still alive.

A greater responsibility...? Is he saying that I need to kill Wilde and avenge Father? Even if Boss Lin didn't say so, I would still have undertaken such a mission...

Melissa sucked in a deep breath. "I will let Father see my growth. I want him to know that I will accomplish what he couldn't and that I will finish what he was incapable of doing..." Melissa choked up slightly as she spoke.

Lin Jie nodded. "Good child."

Chapter 413: Heart

Lin Jie's gentle voice rang in Melissa's head as she tried her hardest to blink back tears.

She had resolved herself not to cry anymore on the night she learned of her father's death, but now she couldn't help shedding tears when someone was here to confide in and offer her comfort.

"Boss Lin..." Teary-eyed, Melissa gazed up at Lin Jie and asked cautiously, "Can you bring my father back to life? I would do anything, even if it costs me my own life."

What the heck? Your own life?! Mr. Lin was startled and wondered if this young lady was thinking straight and contemplated taking her own life because of her father's death.

Thus, he quickly shook his head. "A life cannot be exchanged for a life that has been lost. It's just something that's impossible..."

Melissa understood that Boss Lin refused to resurrect Joseph because she couldn't afford to pay the price. This was an outcome she had already anticipated.

She despised her own weakness and clenched her fists tightly. What made her most angry now was the possibility of Wilde still being alive. If that was true, it would mean her father had died in vain, and everything he had lived for, including his ideals and his life, had been buried in the raging fire.

Had everything been in vain and only exchanged for Secret Rite Tower to call it a 'heroic sacrifice'?

Melissa's anger burned fiercely within her.

Lin Jie couldn't help but sigh. Lying was never a good thing. Joseph was alive and well, yet he had to lie about him being dead. While it was a well-intentioned lie, seeing Melissa with red and swollen eyes made his heart ache a little.

He couldn't help feeling that Joseph's parental methods were just too strict.

"Melissa," Lin Jie encouraged, with a gentle smile and soothing voice. "The dead can't come back to life, but you can believe that miracles can happen in this world."

Melissa immediately looked up, eyes widened as she gazed at Lin Jie.

"Think carefully. What would your father most want to see?" Lin Jie asked while trying to make her see the light.

Melissa furrowed her brow and mulled.

What father would most want to see... Surely that would be to see Wilde's head roll!

"I know! It's..." Melissa was about to answer, but Lin Jie raised a hand to interrupt her and instead said with emphasis, "What your father wants is to see your growth."

Melissa was taken aback.

"Perhaps when you are mature enough and can stand on your own, maybe a miracle will happen," Lin Jie vaguely hinted, and as if to raise credibility, he picked up the stone fragment of the 'Witch of Life.'

"Do you know about the legend of the Primordial Witches, Melissa?" Lin Jie abruptly changed the subject. "This fragment in my hand is a relic left behind by a Primordial Witch eons ago and it represents the flame of life."

Archaeology was like a second expertise for Lin Jie, and it was a field that was impossible for him not to love. Lin Jie had great interest in ancient relics and the wonders that lay in them. The fact that this fragment, after experiencing many years of vicissitudes, finally ended up in his hands was, in a way, the workings of fate and a miracle.

"Look, an ancient relic left by someone thousands of years ago can

be seen by you today. Isn't this a sort of miracle?" Lin Jie said earnestly. "It's a miracle of time and a gift from the world. It's like destiny, totally unpredictable, but you've got to keep believing and wait for the day to come."

Melissa's eyes widened.

Miracle? Flame of life?

The Witch of Life? The first of the four Primordial Witches to 'fall'?

The witch who controls the cycle of life and death?

And Boss Lin is just casually toying with this seemingly mysterious and powerful fragment?

Melissa gulped. *If Boss Lin was playing with the Witch of Life's power in his hands, does that mean to say the miracle he's talking about is resurrecting Father with that power?!*

But, the condition for that is my growth?

"Then, how can I grow, to witness that miracle you are talking about?" Melissa asked excitedly.

Lin Jie blinked and said, "That can only be up to you. As for your growth, we'll have to see how to perform—just like these fragments, where there are three in total and I have two at present. Who knows, maybe fate will bring the third one to me too.

"Similarly, who knows. Perhaps one day your father might also reappear in front of you."

So that's the case... When the three fragments are reunited, that will be the day Father returns!

Melissa was excited and slightly relieved upon hearing this. She immediately started to think about how to perform well in order to please Boss Lin.

Seeing that Melissa was still looking confused, Lin Jie couldn't help but think of recommending her a book.

While it was rather unethical to recommend a book and make money off someone whose father had just ‘died,’ it seemed to be a good opportunity to promote his wares. Thus, Lin Jie turned around and drew a book from the bookshelf. He wiped away the dust on the book’s cover which revealed the title— **Heart** .

“Have a proper read of this book when you return home. It may be of great help,” said Lin Jie with a kind smile as he handed the book to Melissa.

Melissa reached out a trembling hand and took the book. The title on it read— **The Will of Fire** .

“While this book is quite simple, I believe that it can help you greatly. Most importantly, I think it can quell your inner turmoil and help you understand the expectations and love your father had for you.”

Melissa wanted to flip the book open immediately, but Lin Jie stopped her.

“I hope that you read this book while in a calm state of mind. The surroundings here aren’t that suitable,” Lin Jie advised while glancing at the door at the same time.

Your father might be returning with the light bulbs for the new store if you stay here any longer.

Melissa quickly closed the book back. “I’m sorry, Boss Lin. I was being ignorant and didn’t respect this book.”

“It’s fine. Go quickly,” Lin Jie waved her off. Then, just as Melissa was about to step out, Lin Jie called out, “Ahem, the price is 37 dollars.”

Melissa was momentarily stunned, but then she came around almost immediately. *This is the necessary ‘price’!*

Thus, she quickly pulled out 40 dollars from her pocket and prepared to give it to Boss Lin, but then she retracted her hand.

Boss Lin said 37 dollars so it has to be 37 dollars. A single cent more

would be disrespectful to him!

Thus, Melissa rummaged through for change and handed exactly 37 dollars to Lin Jie.

Lin Jie could only muster a slight smile. "..."

Melissa left the bookstore feeling stirred up. To be precise, it felt like fate was guiding her each time she came to the bookstore, and she always gained a lot.

Melissa now understood that Boss Lin could bring her father back to life, but she would first have to show her worth.

Since that is the case...

Melissa raised a hand, and a blooming red flame appeared in her palm.

"I will start by succeeding in Father's responsibilities!"

Melissa headed back to Secret Rite Tower.

Secret Rite Tower had already informed Melissa that she would be taking over her father's post. While this seemed exaggerated for someone her age, many Secret Rite Tower personnel had witnessed Melissa's strength in battle and no one dared question this directive.

Moreover, she had already officially advanced to Destructive-rank and had passed the Truth Union's rank evaluation.

After experiencing the fierce battle at 67th Avenue, Secret Rite Tower was going through a wave of change after countless knights had sacrificed themselves in battle. Now, restructuring and reorganizing were Secret Rite Tower's top priorities.

Secret Rite Tower.

Having similarly been promoted to a Great Radiant Knight, Greg was in his dimly lit office, the blue glare of an electronic display illuminating his face as he tapped away on his keyboard.

A line appeared on the screen — [You have successfully taken over all permissions of Great Radiant Knight ‘Scarlet Lancer’ Vivian.]

As the chief undercover agent who had monitored and probed Boss Lin’s intentions as the massive battle raged, Greg had been promoted to the rank of Great Radiant Knight after the war, replacing the deceased Vivian.

“Knight Vivian was a really great person...”

After obtaining Vivian’s permissions, Greg had to deal with the backlog and saw the previous operation records of this account, which included some instances of helping Joseph with intelligence work.

Vivian didn’t really have a reputation for strength amongst the Great Radiant Knights, but she excelled in personal charm and her ability to command.

Moreover...it was rumored that this heroic and valiant female knight had a bit of an affection for Teacher Joseph, though the latter remained loyal to his deceased wife, with a love as deep as the ocean and as unchanging as the stars in the sky.

But in the end, the both of them had perished together in the line of duty...

Greg felt uneasy and was about to close the interface when he suddenly saw a line right at the very bottom.

“Inquiry... relevant deeds of Great Radiant Knight Darya?”

Greg was stunned.

Darya was the name of Joseph’s late wife.

Was she investigating a love rival?

But this is way too detailed...

Greg clicked on it and saw detailed information and records that included dates and times. Suddenly, his gaze paused, and he saw a

piece of information about the day when Darya perished.

“Negligence by the Logistics Division led to the enemy’s successful attack?

“That’s not right! When I was back in the Logistics Division organizing information, I certainly saw that the duty roster was complete that day, and no one was punished for it.”

But when Greg searched according to what he remember, he found

—

[Lack of information]

Chapter 414: Invitation To Tea

Just like the Truth Union, Secret Rite Tower wasn't a governmental organization.

In the whole of Norzin, no one besides the Central District's central administration could become governmental.

However, the central administration had a rather supportive stance toward organizations like Secret Rite Tower and the Truth Union. As long as their actions were beneficial to Norzin's development and they were willing to lend their aid to the central administration at any time, such organizations were allowed to exist.

This bit also completely revealed the current decline of the Central District's central administration.

A transcendent individual had the right to decide their own path. If they passed a test that was comparable to hell, or were born into a noble family, they could work at the central administration and protect Norzin as a transcendent being.

Of course, if one was aligned with the goals of the Truth Union and Secret Rite Tower, they could also choose to join such organizations.

Secret Rite Tower was the largest organization apart from the central administration, with a public-facing stance of using the dedication of knights to protect their home, Norzin.

Greg wasn't born a noble. Legend had it that the central administration's assessment hadn't been carried out for centuries, and the central administration had long been corrupted by nobles. Thus, the young, outstanding Greg had planned to join Secret Rite Tower from the beginning. His goal was also to gain that glorious and ancient title of Knight.

Greg quickly went through Vivian's information. It was human nature to pry, and he originally wanted to see what went on

between Vivian and Joseph and tried to find if there were any love secrets between the two.

But then he saw — missing data?

Secret Rite Tower was officially recognized as the largest organization in Norzin, with a large number of personnel and a massive system. Every single mission, every single day would be precisely recorded by someone. So, how could there be missing information?

Moreover, this is clearly a duty schedule that I went through before...

Greg frowned in confusion and leaned slumped back against the soft leather sofa, but he didn't relax at all.

Could it be that Great Radiant Knight Vivian had also once investigated the cause of Great Radiant Knight Darya's death?

Someone had specifically deleted that duty roster!

Greg felt as if he was merely discovering the tip of the iceberg. Feeling persistent, he tried his best to recall the duty schedule he had gone through on that day some ten years ago.

His hands were on the keyboard as the blue glow of the screen illuminated his face. As a Great Radiant Knight now, his level of authority was significantly high. Thus, he tried his best to recall from his memory the contents of those documents he had sorted out back then.

I remember that there was a Logistics Division personnel by the name of Reid who was on shift.

Greg immediately searched upon recalling Reid's name. A somewhat common and familiar face immediately appeared on the screen, but in the column besides the photos read the word—deceased.

Greg gulped. Logistics Division personnel weren't supposed to be on the front-lines, so how could he have died so easily.

Greg seized upon the clue and rapidly searched for Logistics Division personnel who had either died or left their jobs in the past ten years.

There were a total of 10 that died and 17 resignations.

And surprisingly, of those that had sacrificed themselves, all of them died ten years ago!

Greg's eyes widened as he searched the schedule from back then once more, simulating the results—all of them had died.

The ten Logistics Division personnel who had died all participated in the mission where Darya had sacrificed herself. The records show that the reason for Darya's sacrifice was due to a shortage of Logistic Division staff, but these ten members had all been present for that mission.

Greg's finger trembled as he typed on the keyboard.

This wasn't a coincidence; it was the work of someone. Another similarity of these ten Logistics Division personnel was that those with families were recorded as martyrs that had sacrificed themselves and their families compensated, whereas those who were single without family on record were said to have died abnormal deaths.

As Greg tried to investigate the causes of their deaths, he found that a lot of information was missing or incomplete. For example, one who was said to have died of lung disease had no proof from a doctor, nor hospital records of the patient's admission.

These ten people had been made to die, and they were all righteous Secret Rite Tower knights, murdered. There wouldn't be anyone that would have wanted to kill them, so there could only be one reason for their deaths.

Greg placed his cursor over the photo ID of a red-haired woman—Great Radiant Knight Darya.

The enemy could only have been inside Secret Rite Tower, which meant Darya had found out some grave secret or had a reason

where she had no choice but to die. And to make sure she died without loose ends, these ten Logistics Division knights were killed off as well.

Greg's hands went limp. There was actually someone within Secret Rite Tower that could kill a Great Radiant Knight without anyone none the wiser.

Wait a minute. Everything is recorded whenever I look at information, just like how it worked with intelligence reports and how Vivan's searches have a history. Have my actions also been discovered?

This is bad... Greg mouthed silently to himself as he prepared to shut off the computer and head home to think of a plan.

Knock knock knock.

Three rasping knocks came for his door, causing goosebumps to break out all over Greg's skin.

He glanced at the clock on his desk showing that it was just a little after 4.30 a.m., which was way past the usual Secret Rite Tower working hours.

Pandemonium-rank Greg slowly stood up and quickly typed out some words to another Indomitable Sacred Flame, Knight Melissa.

But as expected, the message was intercepted.

Aren't these guys a little too fast? No wonder nobody has discovered the cause of Great Radiant Knight Darya's death for so many years.

Frowning, Greg got up from his chair and walked to the door. He opened it and saw a man with sparse hair standing outside, the latter half a head taller than Greg.

Greg glanced at the badge on his chest, which seemed to depict a bound man as if he were caught.

This was a division directly under the Council of Elders.

Greg couldn't help but smile bitterly. He had still been guessing

who within Secret Rite Tower had the power to kill a Great Radiant Knight. Now, he didn't even need to think to know the answer.

"Is anything the matter?" Greg asked even though he knew what was coming.

The man glanced down the empty corridor and smiled. "The Council of Elders wishes to see you. For some tea."

"Does this mean that the abnormal death of Great Radiant Knight Darya is related to the Council of Elders?"

"What are you talking about? I'm just here on the Council of Elder's orders and I don't know anything else," the man said calmly, as if he were a robot.

Greg glanced back at the glowing computer screen. From the moment he began investigating the cause of Great Radiant Knight Darya's death to question the deaths of Logistics Division personnel, he had begun to suspect that Darya's death was related to internal affairs of Secret Rite Tower. It hadn't even been half an hour since he began his investigation, and someone was already knocking on the door.

Greg took a deep breath. The mysterious Council of Elders within Secret Rite Tower, whom he had only ever seen once on the day he was knighted as a Great Radiant Knight.

How he wished that this invitation was just to tell him that it was all a misunderstanding, and there was a reasonable reason for Darya's death...

Chapter 415: What A Coincidence

Maria habitually wanted to tug on the front of her white coat, only to realize she wasn't wearing her usual lab coat today but a normal outfit instead.

She practically spent almost her whole life in laboratories, so wearing other clothes besides her white lab coat were rare occurrences. She had devoted her entire life to the Truth Union, but today she was going to see a special person.

Maria rubbed the stone slab fragment in her pocket and could sense the strong life force from it.

As someone quite ordinary, who frequently encountered bottlenecks, Maria was eager to have herself breakthrough. She eventually chose to go to the Lower District to gain experience, finally managing to withstand the contamination, made a breakthrough, and obtained the fragment of the Witch of Life.

This piece had been her courage and insurance. It was by relying on this fragment was she able to survive deep in the Lower District that was full of contamination.

With her long black hair cascading down her back like a waterfall, Maria pushed up her glasses. In front of her was 23rd Avenue.

She stood there, hands in the pockets of her gray windbreaker as she gazed at the shabby bookstore that didn't even have a signboard.

The boss is seated at the counter talking to a girl who, according to intelligence, should be the bookstore owner's assistant and... at the same time, also another leader of the Sun's Faith.

"Boss Lin, the new store has been readied, and I can officially go over today," said Mu'en.

Lin Jie nodded, informing her of a few things she needed to take note of, and reminded her to be careful on her way.

Maria stood outside the door and only heard the tail end of this conversation.

It sounded normal enough.

But when she thought about the intelligence reports mentioning that the new branch was already occupied by a large number of high level Sun's Faith followers after being open for a day, Maria couldn't help but feel that it was rather ominous.

Mu'en nodded at last and walked out of the bookstore. The moment she turned around, her calm eyes met Maria's gaze.

In that moment, Maria's entire body stiffened up as if she had seen a dark and ancient night sky.

She remained motionless, even after Mu'en had completely passed her by. A warning-like heat came from the fragment nestled in her palm.

"Did you see something you like? Since you are already here, why don't you come in and have a look? You've been standing at the door for quite some time."

Lin Jie had originally come to close the door but hadn't expected to see someone standing outside.

Since you are already outside my store, it means you are a customer of mine. Adhering to this principle, Lin smiled and opened the door wider.

Maria's tense body loosened up, though her original confidence and air had been weakened by her brief encounter with Mu'en.

To be able to keep this level of power for himself...

The bookstore owner was perhaps even more powerful than she had imagined.

However, Maria wasn't one to fear strength. She dared to face challenges head on, whether it was heading to the Lower District or coming to the bookstore today.

As the Chairman of the Truth Union, and as Hood's family, there were some things she needed to find out. Thus, Maria stepped forward and headed to the bookstore owner.

"Hello, miss, are you looking to get some books?" asked Lin Jie with a bright smile.

Maria looked around the bookstore, took a deep breath, and returned a smile. "I'm from the Truth Union and heard that Boss Lin, the owner of this bookstore, is rather knowledgeable, so I came to visit."

Lin was surprised by the increasing number of Truth Union personnel that were visiting his bookstore. He wondered who was spreading the word and praising him to the high heavens.

As he thought about it, he realized it could only be Andrew. *Haa, I was just helping him out with some of his research in alchemy, but... I do hope more of you guys come!*

Lin Jie immediately waved it off modestly. "I merely read a few more books than others, such praise is exaggerated."

"Boss Lin is being too modest," Maria said, faking a smile. "It was my nephew, Hood, who said he was transformed entirely after receiving your teachings once."

Hood's strange transformation and powers were too similar to those afflicted beings in the Lower District. This Lin Jie was definitely somehow connected to the Lower District.

Lin Jie chuckled and replied humbly, "Hood is just naturally talented. I merely gave him some guidance and he's already made remarkable progress."

Ahh, so this is Hood's aunt, the head of the Truth Union that had been in seclusion.

She can't be here to seek redress... so she's here for something else. I'll just praise Hood first and hope that the beating he got when he first came to try and burglarize my store will be forgotten...

Thus, Lin Jie said, "Hood's made tremendous progress in the last half a year and I believe it's related to his newfound love for books. Are you also interested in the books he is reading? Why not get one and see how it goes?"

"I'm not here to buy books," Maria said, stealing a peek at the shelf behind the bookstore owner.

To her, it looked like an endless vortex that rocked her soul. She realized that the bookstore owner's trick was to give books which contained immense power to those he selected. The chosen ones couldn't resist their desire for power and accepted the books, but at that moment, they were also consumed by the books and became followers of the bookstore owner.

It was a clever trap, where people voluntarily got themselves hooked on the hook.

She quickly turned away, not wanting to be tempted by the bookstore owner's words. It seemed that she couldn't sustain this verbal sparring. Maria subconsciously tightened the zips on her pockets. It was time to let him know whose protection she had received.

"Is there something else you would like to talk about?" Lin Jie asked skeptically.

The corner of Maria's lips curled up slightly as she slowly took out the stone fragment from her pocket. "You... probably know what this is, right?"

A cold glint flashed across her eyes. In her head, she had already foreseen the look of shock and panic on Lin Jie's face once he saw the token that belonged to the Witch of Life.

After all, in all ways, the Witch of Life was his natural enemy. If he truly came from the Lower District, then that fire ignited in the

darkness was the light that can dispel the corruption...

Maria gradually awakened the fragment by injecting power into it, and this power pulsed like a heartbeat, making her even more excited.

Lin Jie blinked twice when he saw this very familiar fragment and his smile froze.

Maria scoffed in her heart and felt very pleased to see Lin Jie's false smile shatter like a mask.

"Ahh, it's actually this..." Lin Jie was taken back for a moment, but then his lips twitched and he continued, "What a coincidence. I was talking to a customer yesterday and said that this third fragment might come to me one day, like a miracle of fate."

Maria's eyes widened in shock as she stared incredulously at Lin Jie as he reached under the counter and brought out two boxes which he opened.

And thus, as if mass-produced, two similar fragments appear in front of Maria.

"You... How?!" How do you have a treasure that I nearly gave up my life to obtain? Moreover, it's the mortal enemy of that corruption. Any existence from the Lower District ought to fear it!

Maria felt her head spinning, but the fragments before her were indeed genuine and contained the vibrant power of the Witch of Life.

That pulsating tempo intensified, causing Maria's own heart to beat along with it, making her feel uneasy.

"They were all gifts from customers," said Lin Jie as he toyed with the two fragments. "Speaking of which, I've been researching these two fragments for the past few days and have made some progress.

"Looks like you're here to discuss these fragments as well, eh? It appears that you are an academic as well as an archaeology enthusiast?" Lin Jie chuckled. "Look, this one was gifted by the

Church of Pestilence.”

“Oh, right. Do you know about the Church of Pestilence?” Lin Jie said as if he had just recalled something. “They are a religious group from the Lower District, and they also asked me about these fragments. They even want me to head over to give a lecture and said they would spare no effort to find the last piece.

“But look, the final piece came just like that. That’s why, it’s said that fate works in wondrous ways... Eh? Miss Customer, are you alright?”

Lin Jie was surprised to notice Maria’s dilated pupils and the way she covered her mouth, as if she had just seen something absolutely terrifying.

“I... I’m fine.” Maria shook her head with some difficulty, trying her best to stay calm.

Even though it had been several months since she had left the Lower District, just recalling the cruelty and darkness of the Church of Pestilence as well as the residents of the Lower District made her feel nauseated.

Those people lived in the underground, never seeing the light of day. Muddy water, churning with viscera and bits of flesh, flowed continuously at a level that was never below their calves. Their dead could not be buried in the loose and slimy mud and so were crushed into a part of their underground ecosystem by mining tools as they decomposed.

Those people... perhaps they could no longer be called people, had eyes that were narrow and filled with malice. Their skin was hard and rough, even scaly. Tentacles had covered most of their head, making it hard for Maria to see their full appearance. Or perhaps, because each of them had their own unique deformities.

But there was one thing that was the same. They would always raise their head and look up at the soil above, as if waiting for something...

She once speculated that the Church of the Pestilence that worshiped these strange mutations might have been awaiting for the return of the source of their mutations. And thus, their desire to return to the surface never faded.

And now, the bookstore owner said he wanted to give a lecture to the masses of the Church of Pestilence?

Those monsters of the Church of Pestilence were actually waiting for the bookstore owner to head to the Lower District... Could it be that the man before Maria was the one the Church of Pestilence were waiting for?!

As if her heart was gripped by something, Maria felt a sensation akin to suffocation.

The passageway regulated by the Truth Union had been destroyed, and at the same time, the Ash Chamber of Commerce had claimed to excavated a second passageway. Now, the Church of Pestilence's ambition had been revealed. All of it was no coincidence but a conspiracy that had long been planned!

"If you say so." As Lin Jie said, he prepared himself to receive the third fragment.

Maria's eyes were wide open, and fear spread over her like a rising tide. She clutched the fragment tightly in her hand and tried to pull it back.

However, at that moment, she suddenly found herself unable to move!

No...don't...no, no...

Maria was sweating profusely as she saw the shadow reflected on the wall move slowly, and her own arm seemed to be controlled by it as she slowly presented the fragment to Boss Lin as if it were a treasure.

No!!! Maria screamed internally.

Chapter 416: Blackie's Prank

"No..." Maria struggled, but her body was controlled by the black shadow. She tried to break free, but found that her physical body was not responding and seemingly separated from her soul.

She could feel her soul being completely torn from her body and couldn't help but let out a scream of terror.

Maria dared not struggle anymore. She knew that if she moved recklessly, she would face real death. The black shadow was not in control of her physical body, but her soul.

"Are you okay, Ms. Maria?" Lin Jie came out from behind the counter and tried to support Maria, who seemed like she was having a sudden epileptic fit.

"Ahhh!!!"

Maria let out a desperate shriek when she saw Lin Jie. Her face was turning purple, and her facial expressions twisted with fear as if she had just seen a ghost. That previously calm, emotionless face of hers seemed completely distorted now.

"Help! H-help me!" Maria was completely seized by fear and shook off Lin Jie's hands. Her eyes were widened to their limit, and she could clearly see the black shadow that had just controlled her was now standing behind Lin Jie.

Soundlessly, silently, just staring at her.

"Ah, miss, please calm down." Lin Jie saw Maria gasping for breath and realized that she must have seen something really frightening. He followed her gaze and deduced that the object of her fear was behind him.

Lin Jie suddenly turned around hurriedly, only to see Blackie.

The very same Blackie who helped fix the power, harmless to all

humans and animals.

“Blackie,” Lin Jie was startled and whispered instinctively.

The black shadow tilted its head, then vanished in an instant, leaving Maria, who had been struggling with it, to fall to the ground like a broken cloth bag.

What Maria had been frightened of... was Blackie that had been standing behind Lin Jie unbeknownst to his knowledge.

Lin Jie had nothing but gratitude toward Blackie—after all, Blackie had been the one that granted him with all of humanity’s books from Earth, which was a fulfillment of Lin Jie’s greatest dream.

Moreover, Blackie had always appeared friendly, never once hurting his friends nor customers, including Mu’en and Joseph. Before, Lin Jie had always regarded Blackie as a friendly spiritual entity like those often seen in anime.

With regards to Blackie’s purpose and identity, Lin Jie didn’t care. After all, everyone had their own secrets, and he had never felt any malice from Blackie, who rarely appeared.

But today was different.

Blackie had appeared in sight of others for the first time and seemed to have caused the other person to get quite a fright.

This was the first time Blackie had done something to a customer in the bookstore, although, from a certain perspective, Blackie hadn’t done anything wrong.

While Lin Jie had been rather friendly, he couldn’t clearly sense that Maria seemed to be looking for trouble, given the prior situation that occurred with Hood at the bookstore.

Moreover, to a certain extent, Blackie’s appearance was like an apparition, so it was normal for someone ordinary like Maria to be frightened.

“Miss!” Lin Jie grabbed Maria’s shoulders firmly, forcing her to

calm down, then comforted her, “There’s nothing here, what happened to you just now?”

Hearing this, Maria regained her composure slightly. She stared blankly at Lin Jie’s kind, friendly face. The bookstore owner smiled and said, “Look. Our bookstore is very clean, there’s nothing here.”

As he was saying this, a huge black shadow gradually expanded behind him, as if hiding behind his sinister smile. Countless black shadows extended from it as if they were the snake-hairs of a medusa.

Lin Jie’s gentle comforting words turned into a terrifying threat.

“Y-y-y-you...” Maria stuttered fearfully. Before Lin Jie could react, she had already taken several steps back and opened the bookstore’s door and nearly tumbled out. She bolted regardless of how Lin Jie tried to stop her, as if there was some sort of terrifying presence behind her.

...Do you have to run in this manner? You even dropped your stuff! thought Lin Jie to himself.

With a frown, Lin Jie picked up an old notebook that Maria had dropped on the ground. He shot a fleeting glance at the fleeing Maria and sighed before turning back. When he turned around, Blackie, who had been baring fangs and claws, shrank back into a black shadow of his normal size.

“What’s wrong with you today? What were you trying to do?” Lin Jie sounded displeased and bewildered as he whispered, “You clearly wanted me to spread my books, so why did you scare her away? Isn’t that the task you gave me yourself?”

Blackie didn’t move, staying in his spot and obediently listening to Lin Jie’s reprimand as if it was a mischievous child that had been caught doing something naughty.

“But, well.... Never mind. You probably want to keep that fragment, right?” Lin Jie returned to the counter and eyed the three stone fragments on the table.

Lin Jie then glanced at Blackie and pointed at the fragments. “Do you want to eat this?”

Blackie didn’t react at all and just quietly faced Lin Jie.

If Blackie wanted to eat these stone fragments that came from Life, did it mean that Blackie was an enemy of the Witch of Life?

Bringing Lin Jie here might not be a coincidence after all, since Blackie was originally from here.

It understood this place and had a need toward this world.

So, what... role does Blackie play in the history of the Azir Continent?

Lin Jie gazed at the black figure in front of him as he pondered.

After a moment, Lin Jie took a deep breath, slowly raised his hand, and reached out toward the dark shadow.

Lin Jie didn’t know why he did this. Perhaps he just wanted to touch Blackie? This was the first time he had attempted to do so in the few years since he had met Blackie. What was in that shadow? Was it solid, or was it a cold, watery surface?

Unexpectedly, Lin Jie’s pupils suddenly dilated as he saw Blackie making the same exact motion!

It seemed to be imitating him, and the two of them extended their hands at the same time, fingertips touching for an instant.

His fingertips felt something unexpected. It was similar to the temperature of his own hand, and Lin Jie was stunned for a moment.

He still wanted to touch Blackie further, but in the next instant, like a flickering TV signal, Blackie suddenly blurred and disappeared.

Lin Jie’s finger remained suspended in the air, like nothing had been there before.

Lin Jie withdrew his hand and looked at his empty palm. He could

still feel the realness of that touch from just now.

Is Blackie... human?

Lin Jie shook his head. Humans couldn't have such a form. Perhaps it simply adopted the shape of a human and simulated a body temperature similar to his own.

Also... Blackie probably doesn't want to eat the Witch of Life's fragments. After all, like the previous incident with the golden apple, if Blackie had wanted to, he would have taken them on the spot.

Lin Jie's thoughts shifted from Blackie to the three stone fragments on the table. With brows furrowed, he carefully pieced them together. As Lin Jie had expected, the three fragments fitted perfectly as if they had never been broken.

Lin Jie took out a magnifying glass from the drawer, and the inscriptions on this round stone tablet were now clearly visible, without much damage.

"Life never ends, flames never extinguish...something something?" Lin Jie recited. This ancient text was different from the elven script of the Second Era and appeared to come from an even older variant of writing.

While he could differentiate it, this was like someone who only learned simplified Chinese characters trying to read traditional characters and there were always parts he couldn't recognize.

The lighting in the bookstore gradually dimmed, and Lin Jie found out that it was getting dark outside without even realizing it.

Thus, he walked to the door and gazed outside at the desolate 23rd Avenue as he thought about the day's events and how scared Maria must have been today. Would the Chairman of the Truth Union call the police?

Calling the police wouldn't do any good... The strongest fighting force of the police is right in my store!

Calling for an exorcism wouldn't work as well... Lin Jie's contributions

had been pivotal in the establishment of the current largest faith in Norzin.

Well... There's nothing to worry about, then.

He just hoped that Maria, as a fellow academic, could keep a level head.

Rattle...

Lin Jie closed the rolling shutter of the bookstore, and the interior was plunged into darkness. Then, it suddenly lit up. Lin Jie turned around, and to his surprise, saw the stone table on the table emitting a faint red glow.

Chapter 417: Return Of Life

Lin Jie was taken aback, blinking several times as she stared at the stone slab emitting an eerie red glow.

He, too, had learned some transcendent abilities from Silver and knew that such abnormal phenomena did exist in Norzin, just that they had disappeared into history and Lin Jie wasn't certain if they still survived now.

But at the very least, the Witch of Life wasn't the stuff of legends but a true ancient divine entity.

And she was also an old acquaintance of Silver's.

Lin Jie shut the main bookstore door. The sky outside was already dark, and Joseph had returned and was up to something in the basement.

Lin Jie also hoped that Chairman Maria would be able to return home safe.

The ancient stone tablet emitted a dim light, much dimmer than the bookstore lights, but it seemed to be gradually gaining in intensity. Lin Jie carefully scrutinized the stone tablet, finding the inscription on it obscure and difficult to read.

According to the meaning of the inscription on this stone tablet to pinpoint her location, this thing was very likely the 'wedge' used by the Witch of Life. Which meant to say, this stone tablet might be used to find a path.

As for where this path led and where it went, it was difficult to say.

However, there's quite a chance she will find her way here... Lin Jie mused. Silver had been quite easy to get along with before, but he didn't know how the Witch of Life would be.

At this point, Lin Jie decided he wouldn't be getting any sleep

tonight and would wait and see what this stone tablet was all about.

Having come to his decision, he meticulously searched through the books and research materials on the bookshelves.

After interacting with Silver and high-level academics like Andrew, Lin Jie had obtained quite a lot of information and knowledge about ancient times, though he had only touched on a portion of it. Now, it was time to continue this research.

Lin Jie picked out several useful books and placed them on the table.

In Lin Jie's current outlook, dragons and elves that were once recorded in Azir's ancient times were once real and incredibly powerful existences with incomparable strength and capable of miraculous feats.

And in the records, the Witches akin to creators who controlled everything in the world were even more frightening existences.

Silver, for example, whom Lin Jie was more familiar with, had casually taught him some abilities that enabled him to thwart an attack by the Path of Flaming Sword, protecting Joseph and Vincent in the process.

Silver herself probably had a profound level of knowledge and power that Lin Jie couldn't even imagine.

And as one of the Four Primordial Witches, the Witch of Life probably wasn't inferior to Silver in terms of power.

Lin Jie still felt a little nervous as his thought processes reached this point.

I'm just an ordinary bookstore owner, yet here comes a day where I know two Primordial Witches. No one would believe me if I said so.

Lin Jie flipped open several books that researched the Witch of Life and started to read them seriously.

In Legend of Primordial Life, written in the Third Era, it was said

that the four Primordial Witches didn't have a cooperative relationship. While they knew each other, each of them had differing beliefs and ideas. These came to be the Azir continent's embodiment of the rules.

Among them, the Witch of Life was the kind, compassionate protector, and sympathizer of humanity. In a sense, she was the mother of humanity.

She arrived with lighting and flames, brightening up the originally chaotic world. The existence of flames allowed humanity to build their own homes, but wherever there was light, there was darkness.

And darkness was the breeding ground of the evil god and dream beasts.

At some point, the darkness invaded Azir, contaminating people's minds and causing countless people who witnessed it to die or go insane.

Lin Jie frowned. This passage did not detail how people fell into fear and madness. It was vague and dubious. However, it seemed that this period of time was later referred to as the "Great Pestilence," and the last elf king who died from madness, Candela, was regarded as the source of the plague.

But in truth, the darkness was the cause of the 'contamination.'

Candela was just a poor soul who got blamed due to history being distorted.

Next, Lin Jie went through an ancient book from the Second Era, which was the time of the elves—Ancient Elf Kingdom.

Inside, like the previous book, were legends about the Witch of Life protecting humanity. However, it said that the Witch of Life didn't give fire to humanity and that it already existed from the beginning.

In this book, the Witch of Life believed that elves and ancient dragons became proud, arrogant, and cruel due to their overwhelming power, and thus, the Azir continent under their control was headed toward destruction.

She believed that only the humans she loved could become the masters of this world.

Therefore, she constructed a bonfire and protected all humans when darkness descended. As a witch, she also taught humans many knowledge and skills while allowing humans to reproduce, and eventually, she exhausted her power and fell while protecting humans from the invasion of the evil god.

She was neutral, friendly, and a good witch, but in the Second Era, when elves existed, the Witch of Life was described as a selfish and weak entity in this book.

However, when the era got closer to the age of humans, the kind image of the Witch of Life came to be.

The Primordial Witches were the embodiment of the rules of the whole Azir continent, and perhaps the Witch of Life was the embodiment of human life.

Lin Jie flipped through several more books about the Witch of Life. These books were mostly similar, some were exaggerated, but they all included stories of the Witch of Life using fire to resist darkness.

Ahh, this 'darkness' seems to be rarely recorded . Lin Jie rubbed his chin as he mulled.

However, in some documents, the darkness was referred to as the 'evil god'—this evil god didn't even reveal its face, but its mere arrival caused the entire era of elves to perish.

In this way, while it seemed a bit selfish to only favor humanity, it was precisely because the Witch of Life preserved the spark of human life that allowed the Norzin of today to exist.

Lin Jie flipped through the book, propping his cheek with one hand. He didn't know how long he had been reading, and drowsiness set in.

As if wandering for a long, long time and finally finding its way back, a red, misty light started swirling in mid-air around the stone tablet, and the temperature of the entire room began to heat up.

Meanwhile, Lin Jie had fallen into slumber.

“Huuu...”

Lin Jie felt as if he had been bumped into someone and awoke. He glanced to see who it was, but merely saw a fleeting shadow.

Blackie?

Lin Jie's eyes widened as he saw the stone tablet in front of him glowing like a cluster of flames. A wisp of smoke swirled around the tablet and passed through it.

The brightness of the tablet intensified, and the smoke gradually spread, slowly taking on a blurry humanoid female form.

Half of her face was surrounded by flames, while the other half was covered in scales. She floated in mid-air, with slightly drooping wings spread out from her back. All around her, the flames flowed to the ground like a cape.

Lin Jie's mouth was agape from surprise, and he was speechless for quite some while.

She... she really came?!

The Witch of Life finally opened her eyes, which were filled with pure white light, and the first person she saw was Lin Jie.

Lin Jie took a deep breath and gave her what he felt was his friendliest and most respectful smile. “Hello.”

However, what happened was that the Witch of Life's expression did turn when she saw Lin Jie.

Lin Jie greeted her earnestly, “Hello, I'm Lin Jie, a...”

“It's... It's actually you?” The Witch of Life couldn't believe her eyes and frowned as soon as she saw Lin Jie.

“Y-you've come back!” exclaimed the Witch of Life in disbelief.

Lin Jie pointed to himself in puzzlement.

The Witch of Life's expression gradually turned fearful and grotesque, like Maria before her. "S-so, it's like this..." she muttered.

Frowning, Lin Jie asked in bewilderment, "Are you mistaking me for someone else?"

Chapter 418: Eat Fresh

“Are you mistaking me for someone else?” Lin Jie asked in bewilderment.

Having met a powerful witch like Silver, Lin Jie wasn’t too worried about facing the Witch of Life who was an entity of a similar level.

While he might just be a bookstore owner, Lin Jie had seen quite a lot, stopped the Path of the Flaming Sword’s extremist attacks, assisted in the establishment of the Sun’s Faith, and had a former central figure of the police in his store...

Therefore, Lin Jie wasn’t flustered in the face of that unfriendly attitude of the Witch of Life, though he was a tad surprised.

“Mistaken?” The Witch of Life’s eyes narrowed, realizing that the situation was somewhat different from what she had imagined.

Observing the increasingly threatening austere aura of the Witch of Life, Lin Jie reckoned that not all witches were like Silver, who was both beautiful and kind.

The Witch of Life only had half a face that was human, while the other half was covered in scales. Her body was practically composed of flames, and these flames flowed like magma over her, emitting high temperatures like a cloak that could burn down the surrounding bookshelves at any time.

Isn’t she scary looking?

“Yes.” Lin Jie nodded cautiously. “You’ve got the wrong person.”

Life hesitated for a moment. The figure before her did seem human, and although there was a hint of a nauseating evil mixed in with his aura, his intrinsic self seemed...

She glanced around at the vast bookshelves and that familiar and permanent darkness. This entire bookstore seemed like an endless

black hole.

No! He's using words to trick me!

Thousands of years ago, she was devoured by the 'darkness' and fell. Life thought she could escape and left her tokens, awaiting the guidance of fate to resurrect her. However, she never expected that after thousands of years, she would be resurrected inside the evil god's belly today.

Lin Jie saw that the witch had stopped talking and appeared to calm down a bit. Perhaps, they would be able to have a conversation now.

Thus, Lin Jie cleared his throat before starting again, "My name is Lin Jie. I'm an ordinary bookstore owner but was fortunate to have some interaction with Silver previously and I learned quite a bit from her. You should know her too, right?"

Lin Jie talked about his own identity, but Life seemed to see through his current identity and view the darker place behind him.

His shadow continuously expanded, seemingly intensifying during his chatter, and eventually turning into a dark, boundless abyss. It was neither a terrifying monster nor a powerful force, just pure darkness, capable of devouring everything.

The cosmos, stars, all things, life... It would devour everything.

And this was the place Life feared the most. Her face was already half-human, and right now, within the flames, her whole face seemed to warp.

Life shut her eyes, a curtain of scarlet flame covering her pupils. She hoped to resist this powerful and terrifying fear by sinking into a darkness she created herself.

"So, what I'm saying is..." Lin Jie earnestly tried to explain about himself, but then he saw the Witch of Life had shut her eyes.

Lin Jie frowned and realized that the witch wasn't even listening to him. Moreover, the flames over her body were burning stronger and

gradually spreading.

The first thing that came to Lin Jie's mind was worry about the books on nearby shelves. A tinge of anger surged in his heart, but he still asked politely, "Wait, could you please tone down your flames?"

For all his life, Lin Jie could tolerate others being rude, and he could forgive reckless transgressions. However, if someone were to destroy his books, he would get real mad...

With her eyes tightly shut, the witch uttered, "There's no way I would make a mistake recognizing you. I was born to be a destined enemy of yours. You can dream on extinguishing this flame!"

It had been many ages since she had lit the bonfire to illuminate the world. In the endless darkness, one could easily be devoured if they weren't careful. This was why she had raised countless humans—to gain a sense of security.

"Whether past or present, my flames will continue blazing brighter and brighter till all your evil lairs are incinerated!"

Suddenly, she opened her eyes, and the flame spread out wings, transforming her into a raging fire that swept everything in its path as it charged toward Lin Jie.

Lin Jie instinctively tried to use the aether stored within his dream realm to protect the books, but he forgot to save himself.

In the next moment, the huge shadow that had been lurking behind him suddenly expanded...

Rip—

Lin Jie's eyes widened in shock as he witnessed everything that was unfolding before him. His shadow morphed into a mysterious black substance that started to twist and materialize into countless tentacles. At the instant where the witch rushed him, those tentacles wrapped around her and tore her apart in a heartbeat.

Flame-like blood flowed freely, spurting about like scorching lava.

At that moment, the witch's face was twisted in excruciating pain as she was torn apart.

However, the first thing that came to Lin Jie's mind was... whether the burning flames or blood would damage the floor and shelves.

But at this point where he had the thought, the floor, except for the bit that stood out, turned into a dark abyss, which absorbed the witch's lava-like blood before it even hit the ground.

“Aaaah!”

The witch let out a final shriek. She was unable to escape this time and couldn't even set a resurrection token like she did thousands of years ago.

Perhaps, the darkness had been waiting thousands of years for Life, or maybe, the concept of history of thousands of years didn't exist toward such an entity. Time couldn't wear away its power; it already knew everything and was just waiting for this moment.

The witch's head was crushed by black tentacles, and one of her eyeballs fell to Lin Jie's feet. Lin Jie glanced down and saw that the eyeball still seemed to be staring at him.

Honestly, she's still rather scary-looking... thought Lin Jie to himself as the eyeball was consumed by the darkness.

In mere seconds, the witch was completely swallowed up. The fire of Life, who had come from ancient times and protected humankind, had also completely extinguished.

After consuming the witch, the darkness that had swelled gradually started to shrink and resumed the form of a man-shaped shadow standing in front of Life.

Lin Jie looked around at his surroundings. It seemed like nothing had taken place, and even the books on the counter were just as they were before.

“Blackie, did you just... eat Life?” asked a dumbstruck Lin Jie.

Blackie didn't answer, merely standing facing Lin Jie like an apparition. However, Lin Jie already knew the answer.

Perhaps the witch hadn't mistaken the wrong person, but the one she feared wasn't Lin Jie but Blackie who was behind him... That meant to say, he had wronged the witch.

And the true reason Blackie hadn't eaten the stone fragments right away was so he could eat the Witch of Life fresh...

In the legends of the Witch of Life, there was always the tale of using the bonfire to resist the darkness. And that darkness was possibly the evil god that had destroyed the elven kingdom and made all creatures go crazy.

Does that mean Blackie is that evil god? Lin Jie had a complex look on his face.

However, Blackie had never harmed him. It had even helped him realize many trivial things that it could have easily just ignored. Ever since Lin Jie transmigrated, Blackie had always been on Lin Jie's side, and just now too...

Lin Jie looked at Blackie and wanted to ask him if he was bad. But then, he felt that such a question was a little too childish.

Perhaps there wasn't any justice nor evil in this world. Lin Jie considered himself a kind person who had helped countless others ever since he was born, in no way inferior to Vincent. Whoever it was who came to this bookstore, regardless of whether they were down and out or impoverished, Lin Jie always does his best to comfort and save them.

Lin Jie was a good man, and those who knew him wouldn't refute this claim.

But just now, Life had attacked him without justification and tried to... kill him.

Who was right and who was wrong?

Lin Jie glanced at the circular 'wedge' once more, which had lost its

glow and became ordinary broken stone.

If it weren't for Blackie, he would be dead.

“Thanks for saving me just now, Blackie.”

Chapter 419: Welcome

Hurried footsteps broke the tranquility of the Mansion No. 72 in the Central District.

A maid headed up the stairs and gently pushed open the master room.

The master hadn't left the house in three days and would probably starve to death if this continued.

"Miss Maria?"

The maid saw a figure curled up on the bed. Ever since her master, Chairman Maria, had returned from the Upper District, she had rushed back home in tears as if she had seen a ghost. Since then, she had locked herself in the house and hadn't come out for three days.

As a descendant of a family of renown academics, Maria had inherited her parents' interest in the sciences and also worked hard to become the Chairman of the Truth Union. This was the first time the maid, who had watched Maria as a child grow into the woman she was today, saw her master so frightened.

The maid picked up her courage and walked to the bed, only to see that the person under the blanket was trembling uncontrollably.

The maid lifted the blanket, and Maria screamed like a frightened bird. Her face was pale, her eyes swollen, and her hands and feet were cold. In just three days, she seemed to have lost so much weight.

"Miss... Maria?" The maid was shocked by her master's condition.

Maria was shivering, her eyes empty and her mind lost. Although she still retained some sense of herself, she had lost her sense of reason forever.

“Miss, what’s wrong with you?” The maid asked anxiously.

“L-Life has been killed. The goddess who protects human life has completely disappeared...” she choked out.

The Witch of Life had saved her in the Lower District multiple times, and Maria had nearly become her vessel for her arrival. Now that Life had fallen, Maria could sense it ever so clearly.

As the embodiment of rules for human life on the entire continent of Azir, the fall of the Witch of Life meant that humankind could be punctured like a thin piece of paper at any moment.

Maria, who fully accepted this fact, had thus lost her sense of reason forever.

Blythe Sisley took out a delicately crafted pocket watch from his custom-made suit and gazed at it till the hands pointed to 10 o’clock. He then put away the pocket watch and gazed out the window.

The car he was in swayed gently like it was floating in water, and the surrounding streets were well-groomed with high-end shops on both sides, where business had been conducted for many generations.

“Under the governance of the central administration, Norzin is truly great...” Blythe lamented, his head turning toward the neatly dressed driver seated in the front.

“That’s right, sir,” replied the driver at once.

“Yes, not even a poor person can be seen in Norzin,” Blythe continued, “I feel that my hard work and efforts haven’t been in vain just by looking at Norzin’s prosperity and happiness.”

“You are truly kind, sir.”

Haa, of course... This is the Central District, how could there be any poor folk here.

The driver ridiculed in silence, but he didn’t dare say it aloud. This

old man wasn't just any simple person.

"Indeed, I am too softhearted and can't bear to see poor people." Blythe sighed.

He was actually one of the heads of the adjudication bureau, which controlled the whole of Norzin, as well as one of the most esteemed people in the city.

The adjudication bureau was the top hierarchy of Norzin's central administration, and those helming it had inherited their positions generation after generation. Their ancestors were the twelve great men who created Norzin.

As a descendant of one of those great men, Blythe Sisley became a member of the adjudication bureau by virtue of his excellence, though his status within it wasn't that high. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been the one sent to investigate the bookstore owner's new branch.

Half a month ago, the adjudication bureau gathered under the inverse tree thousands of meters beneath the Central District's central park for a meeting. Eventually, they came to two conclusions—first, to wait for the Path of the Flaming Sword to take action against Lin Jie, and second, to investigate the objective of Lin Jie's branch store.

As the youngest member among those old men and women, Blythe confidently accepted the task of investigating the bookstore owner's branch.

Unfortunately, Blythe didn't reckon that the bookstore was very strong.

Blythe learned that the bookstore owner had been on his own from the beginning, and his only companion was the assistant that had come to help open the new branch. While the bookstore owner had demonstrated extraordinary strength several times, Blythe still remained skeptical.

With Lin Jie's unpredictable behavior, it was difficult to guess his

true intentions.

If he didn't have any objective, then why would he be doing all of this? But if he did have an objective, then given the strength he had displayed so far, destroying Norzin wouldn't be out of the question for him, yet he didn't do so. Instead, he kept distributing his power, opening a branch store, and expanding his influence.

Those that were truly powerful would disdain working with insignificant insects. Had Lin Jie surpassed the Witch of Trees' might, he would have acted already.

Thus, Blythe had purposely taken the initiative to propose the task of investigating Lin Jie's branch store.

If this task were successful, he would undoubtedly become a central figure in the adjudication bureau.

"Sir, we have arrived." The driver stopped the car at area A, No. 48. The original Fred family mansion had been completely renovated, and it was now an overly extravagant bookstore.

Blythe got out of the car and saw only one delicate-looking girl in the huge bookstore.

Blythe recalled that this girl used to be a homunculus created by the Truth Union, but now she had since been transformed into a real girl by Lin Jie, and her power level was difficult to ascertain.

"Welcome." Mu'en robotically bowed to Blythe before the latter had even fully entered.

The branch store had just opened recently, and Blythe was the first customer. In a certain sense, he was the first to accept Boss Lin's test.

Blythe leaned on his cane and walked to the counter of the bookstore, revealing a smile.

"Hello, miss. Your bookstore is really luxurious," Blythe said with a smile. "This sort of dignified bookstore is really suited to the Central District's vibe."

Mu'en didn't answer and instead gazed at him as if he were an insignificant insect. Blythe had never been treated like this before and wanted to say something, but he found it hard to breathe in the face of Mu'en's oppressive gaze.

Mu'en's branch didn't have an endless supply of books like Lin Jie's bookstore. Instead, the books here were personally selected by Boss Lin.

Mu'en and Vincent agreed that this was Boss Lin's trust in them, so they had roughly versed themselves about the contents of each book but didn't read them. After all, even Mu'en and Vincent would lose their sanity if they were allowed to read all these books freely.

"Since you have entered this bookstore, then does it mean you are prepared for the trial?" A glint appeared in Mu'en's pitch-black pupils as if it were a bright star in the night sky.

"What?! Trial?" Blythe stared at Mu'en inexplicably. This was completely different from what he had envisaged.

According to central administration's intelligence, the bookstore owner would first put on a display before selling books, then play the role of a bookstore owner. He didn't act out toward ordinary people, disliked others mentioning his powerful identity, and wouldn't show off his divine powers casually.

Blythe had wanted to use this conversation to probe the identity of the bookstore owner.

However, this young girl had actually used her status as a powerful transcendent being to firmly suppress him the moment he had walked in.

The young girl in white had already turned away and walked toward a black bookshelf. She picked out a book from within and held it up to Blythe as if it were a treasure.

Mu'en lightly stroked her hair and tucked it behind her ear, appearing rather graceful if the book in her hand was ignored.

The book had a smooth, lustrous cover...

Like a... like a human-skin-bound book?! Blythe's eyes widened to their limit.

"Perhaps letting you truly appreciate Boss Lin's work might change you a bit." Mu'en slightly tilted her head, the corners of her mouth curving slightly upward at her heartfelt reverence for Boss Lin's book.

Chapter 420: Lack Of Imagination

The lips of the girl in white curved up, and her pitch-black eyes were dark like an abyss.

Mu'en wasn't like Boss Lin who would give guidance to others and come up with all sorts of means to sell books and make money. Her task was to spread books, and anyone could read them. If they didn't descend into madness, then they would be someone that Boss Lin had chosen.

But if they became insane, then they weren't qualified to become a follower of Boss Lin and would need to be eliminated as soon as possible. After all, unnecessary people were a waste of resources and might even affect the end game.

Blythe trembled as he observed the girl's smile. *Why isn't she following the usual script? Aren't you supposed to take a whole lot before getting to the point? Why are you so straightforward right off the bat?*

"Th-thank you, Miss Assistant," Blythe forced a smile. "I'll have this book and bring it back to read."

"Bring it back?" Mu'en's smile disappeared instantly, and she tilted her head to the side. She appeared cute but also, in a sense, vaguely terrifying.

"You can go back," Mu'en said casually, "but I suggest you read it now. After all, if this book isn't suitable for you, I might be able to give you a less challenging one."

Blythe's mouth twitched. He didn't dare to read this book at all. His talent was average, but before he came, he had gotten several white magicians of his family clan to put sigils on him that could help him resist the power of the books.

Blythe really didn't intend to read this book now. His goal was to obtain the book and bring it back to run experiments on it.

"So, it's still better to read it here," Mu'en concluded.

"No, no, no, I'll read it back home. I don't want to disrupt your business here," Blythe quickly declined.

Upon hearing these words, Mu'en paused for a moment before responding, "It won't be a problem, but if you can't handle the book, I will have to take it back. Otherwise, that would really be wasting my time."

"Wasting what time? Miss Assistant, you are really humorous," Blythe pretended to gloss over what she said.

"Time wasted to collect your corpse," Mu'en replied with a deadpan expression, which left Blythe at a loss for words. "After all, I will still have to retrieve the book."

Blythe gulped and felt immense pressure just looking at Mu'en. This was something he had never experienced before. As a member of the adjudication bureau, though having a low status within, he was still a Destructive-rank transcendent being. Before coming here, he had also been buffed by several sigils from white magicians. But right now, he was completely suppressed by Mu'en, and if he were to try to escape, Mu'en could probably kill him with a single blow.

Blythe slowly took the book, recalling the sigils granted to him by the magicians. He closed his eyes, then opened them again—

In his mind, colorful and vibrant illusions appeared, like a rainbow of stained glass. When Blythe gazed at the book, it was as if he was looking through a thick layer of glass.

This thick glass was his insurance policy and his trick to pretend he was reading the book. Blythe finally breathed a sigh of relief, feeling glad that he had made preparations for this beforehand.

Suddenly, he heard a man's voice behind him. "How does it feel?"

Blythe was startled and nearly dropped the book. He turned around

in his hazy state and was met with a brilliant glare of light.

“Ahhh!!!” Blythe cried as he fell to the ground.

The one who had spoken merely glanced at Blythe, then ignored him.

“Miss Mu’en, is this the newcomer who has come to undergo the trial?” Vincent asked as he observed Blythe lying on the ground.

Mu’en nodded. “Mr. Vincent, your arrival was quite sudden.”

“I was passing by while preaching and came here to pay my respects to you,” Vincent replied politely.

Mu’en nodded and eyed Blythe. “Mr. Lin’s plan has already been completed. This man is just a pawn sent by the central administration to probe Boss Lin’s gospel.”

“As expected, you were able to see it right away,” Vincent said admiringly.

Mu’en came out from behind the counter, but in Blythe’s eyes, all he saw was the glowing light of that book diffusing as a myriad of rainbow colors due to the white magician’s sigils acting as a prism.

However, Blythe hadn’t expected Vincent, who was akin to a sun-like ball of fire, to suddenly appear. The power of the sun that protected Vincent assaulted Blythe’s face, causing his eyeballs to burst. Now there were only two empty sockets, and he lay screaming hoarsely on the ground.

Mu’en squatted beside Blythe, smiling as she observed him.

Blythe gradually calmed down. Anyone beside her would be able to feel the peaceful tranquility of night.

Mu’en moved her hand and gently wiped at his eyes. Like gentle moonlight, she healed Blythe’s eyes.

Blythe slowly opened them. At that moment, it was as if he saw the moon. A round moon that existed above the endless stars, with

Mu'en's smiling face on it.

"Get up," Mu'en said nonchalantly. In a blank state of mind, Blythe was helped to a seat by Mu'en.

"What's this...?" Vincent asked with a frown. He couldn't help wondering about Mu'en's reason for doing this.

Boss Lin's goal is to eliminate all weak humans; those who can't be selected. This Blythe person can't even look me in the eye, let alone become one of Boss Lin's chosen ones.

"He is from the central administration. Since the central administration wants to investigate Boss Lin's strength and goals, then we'll just make use of them." Mu'en smiled as she gazed at Blythe, who had a vacant expression, and continued to place the book in front of him.

"Did you just give him this book?" Vincent raised an eyebrow when he saw the book, *Echo of the Abyss*. "It's the scripture written by Boss Lin himself."

Vincent could only lament. Although he very much wanted to read and appreciate it, he knew that this book wasn't for him and he would never touch it.

Since it's the Goddess of the Night's judgment, then perhaps this book belongs to Blythe.

Blythe carefully read the book, and his body started to gradually transform.

"The central administration is underestimating Boss Lin," Mu'en said expressionlessly. "Since that's the case, let's give them a time bomb."

As Mu'en said that, she took out a cup of milk tea from beneath the counter and vigorously shook it, causing the pearl-like black and red eyeballs inside to sway.

Mu'en kindly placed the milk tea that had been specially prepared for Blythe in front of him.

Blythe's inner self was immersed in an indescribable calmness, as if he had returned to the rainy night of his childhood, lying in bed and listening to his mother telling stories...

And the book in front of him, ***Echo of the Abyss***, was like the reverberation of a long and beautiful song from a deep valley.

From Vincent's point of view, after ***Echo of the Abyss*** was opened, countless tentacles grew out of it, reaching into Blythe's facial orifices and stirring his brain.

Soon, he will become a puppet of Boss Lin, helping us monitor every move of the central administration.

Vincent revealed a smile. All these blasphemous actions were perhaps due to a lack of imagination.

Chapter 421: ‘I’

Ji Zhixiu sat in the study of A16 Manor, solemnly going through the letter in front of her. Her father, Ji Bonong, sat opposite her, taking a sip of red wine from his hometown in the Northern Lands, before turning toward Ji Zhixiu. The daughter before him was no longer that little girl who had endured sordid blood and once bore all his hopes.

Ji Zhixiu had a slight smile as she put down the letter and said, “Boss Lin’s branch has been opened, it’s the Fred Family mansion that we previously offered.”

“Miss Mu’en is in charge,” added Ji Zhixiu slightly pensively.

Ji Bonong nodded. “It seems that Boss Lin has decided to make a move on the Central District. The real gift we gave him ought to have been opened about now.”

The red wine swirled in the tall glass, like blood—dark, red, and thick. Ji Bonong’s warped face was reflected in the center of the swirl.

He gazed into the red wine and understood deep down... The motive for opening a branch in the Central District was already clear. Ji Bonong felt that he would completely let down Boss Lin’s trust if he didn’t take action now.

“I was still wondering how to avoid the adjudication bureau’s eyes in our plan to reform the Central District, but it looks like Boss Lin is helping us once again,” Ji Zhixiu said with a smile as she put the letter which represented the current situation of the nobles into the fireplace, and the flames devoured it to ashes.

Ji Zhixiu had used mind parasitism at the auction and succeeded in getting into the heads of everyone. However, deep down, she was actually worried about whether this would be discovered by the adjudication bureau.

Having their plans found out was only a matter of time, so they needed to act quickly.

“Seku Family, Palachi Family, Aldreu Family, Ludwig Family, Hanno Family, Stuart Family...” Ji Bonong recited.

All of these families were ones that controlled the Central District, but now, each of their family heads was under Ji Zhixiu’s control.

“I already control these families. As long as I give the order, the traces in their minds will completely take over them. It’s been a week since the auction, and the parasitic hosts under my control should have already spread my ‘tentacles’ far enough.”

When they returned home, hugged their families, or talked, the mind parasites would spread like a virus.

Ji Zhixiu started to organize the information in her hands as she spoke, “I had wanted to let it fester for a while more, but now that Boss Lin has already come, we don’t have to wait for an opportune moment.”

Eyes still on the wine glass he was twirling, Ji Bonong said, “We still need a pretext to take action. The Truth Union’s destruction of the passage to the Lower District a few days prior is one such reason. We can’t do business without the mines in the Lower District. With no way of doing business, we can’t pay salaries and have no choice to stop production...”

Ji Zhixiu smiled and nodded. “I’ve already arranged for it.”

Ji Bonong looked toward his daughter in both surprise and excitement.

“I have submitted an application for a layoff at Rolle Resource, and it has already been approved by the adjudication bureau. Those brainless bunch surely do not know how important a job at Rolle Resource is for a power family. Now they can’t even afford a loaf of bread,” said Ji Zhixiu.

Ji Bonong couldn’t help but laugh out loud. “Those people would probably say why not have steak if they can’t afford bread.”

The father and daughter smiled at each other.

“I have secretly placed many laborers under parasitic control, and they have been spreading propaganda among all the workers every day. They will start plotting a revolt against the Central District over the next few days. At the time, all the controlled nobles...” Ji Zhixiu walked to the floor-to-ceiling window and gazed at the fountain in the backyard against the beautiful backdrop of the Central District’s beautiful blue sky.

She took a deep breath and smiled. “All the Central Districts nobles are all... me!”

Countless images flooded her mind like scenes from a movie. These were all the puppets she had parasitized, and every one of them had practically become a part of her. She judged every thought and action of each of these individuals.

As she smiled, thousands of residents and nobles across the Central District smiled too.

Children with cotton candy walking on the street, noble girls enjoying the scenery on a lake boat, factory foremen whipping workers, black cats raised by nobles turning around a street corner... they all looked in the same direction. There was the central park that regulated the air, blue sky, and beauty of the entire Central District.

Him, her, it... all of them were Ji Zhixiu.

Becoming a race... Now, the entire Central Area is ‘I.’

“Blythe. What are you smiling about?”

Under the massive inverse tree, Barr, who was practically the adjudication bureau’s head, asked Blythe, who had just returned from the bookstore.

Blythe’s smile remained unchanged as he explained, “Nothing much, I was just thinking about my wife who’s about to give birth soon.”

Once Blythe said that, all other members of the adjudication bureau fell silent as they stared at Blythe as though he were a strange creature.

Amon scoffed. "Is there something wrong with your head? I recall that your wife is already 56 years old this year, and she's just an ordinary person."

Glancing at Amon who was mocking him, Blythe frowned. His past self would have immediately leaped up and yelled, but he was now a person baptized by Boss Lin.

Thus, he shrugged. "I was just making a joke. Why take it so seriously?"

Barr waved them off and said, "Enough, Blythe is still young after all."

Blythe was indeed the youngest among them. He was only in his sixties, which was considered really young compared to the 'humans' before him who were all over a hundred years old.

"Alright. You went to investigate the branch store. What have you found out?"

Blythe earnestly gave his briefing. "That branch currently isn't taking any action. It seems to be just the Sun's Faith intention to spread their faith to the nobles and it has little to do with the bookstore. I think that there's no need to be so nervous. We should just pay more attention to the movements of the Ash Chamber of Commerce."

The rest of the group exchanged glances upon hearing what was said and began to express their own opinions.

While they were discussing, Blythe walked to the side of the large fruit and glanced at the sleeping Witch of Trees inside. He closed his eyes and, using the power as one of the night's chosen, transmitted everything he saw underneath the inverse tree to that woman.

Fred Mansion, Lin Jie's first branch store.

Mu'en, who was shaking milk tea by hand, suddenly stopped as a hint of surprise appeared in her eyes.

Fraxinus, the Witch of Trees, is actually there... Mu'en, who had succeeded Walpurgis, the Witch of the Night, naturally knew who the Witch of Trees was. She was the massive tree that grew on the dream wall and supported the existence of the entire Norzin.

This is what those members of the Central District's adjudication bureau relied on?

However, Mu'en merely stopped for a moment before continuing to shake her milk tea.

This sort of trivial matter wasn't worthy of disturbing Boss Lin about, and it was something she could easily solve herself.

Mu'en finished shaking and handed the milk tea to the customer who was reading in front of him. The customer had a look of obsession and pain as he read, but when he took a sip of the tea, his eyes brightened, and he burst into laughter and danced around, saying, "I understand, I understand." Then he suddenly fell to the ground, and a few thin tentacles emerged from his nose and mouth before retracting.

Mu'en sighed and said expressionlessly, "Time to clean up again."

Chapter 422: Lin Minghai's Journal

The spring in Norzin was brief.

Or rather, it could be said that in this city of steel which lacked greenery, not a hint of spring could be felt in the outer areas of the Upper District, much less so in the slums where factories were densely concentrated.

Under the gloomy sky filled with thick black smoke, workers with pale faces and hurried expressions headed to factories filled with heavy smog every day of their lives.

Lin Jie reckoned he probably wouldn't get any customers today.

He eyed the empty bookstore pensively. While he was used to being alone, he still felt comfortable with the lively atmosphere when Mu'en and Joseph were still around.

Fortunately, Joseph only went out to bring some warmth to the refugees and the community and would be back soon...

Joseph had been like this recently, heading out to do his own thing as if he were the secretive and mysterious Batman.

Lin Jie guessed that it was probably related to Melissa, so he didn't interfere.

Now he was the only one left in this place... No, to be precise, there was still Blackie.

Lin Jie recalled the events that unfolded yesterday. Those slick-looking black tentacles reaching out from behind him and trapping the Witch of Life.

Hmm... Lin Jie rubbed his chin. Although tentacles were a traditional symbol of evil monsters, Blackie had originally been a

human form shadow. It was worth looking into why it had chosen to take the form of tentacles.

Moreover, the target was a beautiful woman with a good figure and appearance... if the non-human qualities of flames on her body were ignored.

So... Blackie is actually a dirty old man?

Lin Jie's thoughts wandered as he sat alone at the counter. Then, as if recalling something, he took a notebook out from the drawer.

There were familiar patterns on this notebook, and it was clear that this one originated from the same place as the notebook Lin Jie himself had, which was the Shendu Archaeological Institute of Cultural Relics.

The current notebook had been dropped by Maria. Unlike the previous one, this notebook seemed to have suffered little damage nor dirt and appeared quite intact.

Lin Jie hadn't gone through the notebook immediately after he got it because he felt some sense of unease. His intuition told him that this notebook might reveal the answers to the questions he had been pondering for a long time, but it would also make him face certain things.

After hesitating for a long time, Lin Jie took a deep breath and opened the journal.

A line of bold, familiar handwriting firmly caught his gaze.

"1st March, sunny."

"The results of the survey are out. If there aren't any issues, the area beneath should be a lost, ancient kingdom, and just writing these down makes me feel faint excitement."

"But Professor Chen, who is in charge of the survey, says that there may be strange never-before-discovered magnetic fields down there which may have unknown effects on humans. Perhaps we will need to study it more before we can go down."

“But someone has to go down, right? And this is a ruin that we discovered first. What’s the point if someone else steals the credit for all our years of hard work?”

“Professor Chen is a like-minded and truly good friend of many years. He doesn’t want his years of hard work to be taken away by others as well. We quickly agreed to formally initiate the project and conduct excavation work, and the information about the magnetic field will be temporarily kept secret.”

“Caiyong thinks that I’m overly burdened by my worries of late and am under great psychological pressure. She suggested increasing the dosage of my medication, but I told her not to worry. We’ve been through so many years, what could go wrong?”

“However, she’s always like this. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with it. I love seeing her worried about me, and it’s great that her eyes are all on me.”

Lin Jie’s eyes widened when he saw the name Caiyong. That was his mother’s name—Zhang Caiyong.

Just as he guessed, this archaeological team was the one his father, Lin Minghai, was a part of on his last archaeological project.

In other words, the owner of this notebook was his father, Lin Minghai.

“17th March, sunny.”

“I underestimated the magnetic field influence in this area.”

“My student, Wang Qi, has developed hysteria, perhaps due to excessive stress, or perhaps due to something else, but we cannot expose the issue about the magnetic fields. Otherwise, the project will come to a halt, and everything will all be in vain... I asked Caiyong to diagnose him with hysteria and send him to the hospital.”

“I am upset... but research is something that us archaeologists must do. In other words, who else is willing to go through hell if not me?”

"I have explained the entire situation to the team members and any member that doesn't want to continue is allowed to quit immediately."

"Fortunately, no one wishes to pull out. They are all good colleagues and good students of mine. They are full of vigorous curiosity, and even urge me to continue. These are the flames of humanity. It is because of this curiosity that humans can decipher puzzles over and over, which move us forward."

"Caiyong suggests that we must have a means to vent; otherwise, the pressure of long-term high-intensity work will continue to increase, and more people will experience issues with their mental state of well-being."

"Thus, I've asked everyone to start documenting a journal, to record research results as well as to vent their thoughts. Even if we perish someday, these journals can let others know about our efforts. Even leaving something behind for future generations is good."

"27th March, sunny."

"Old Chen said that the geological conditions ahead are no longer suitable for exploration, but he doesn't want to give up and is researching methods to progress further."

"He seems very excited, but his eyes do not seem to be focused, which makes me rather uneasy... but perhaps that is just my imagination. We had a heart-to-heart talk, and I was able to understand what he envisaged. My goal is the same, so I decided to put aside my doubts and ensure the excavation progresses smoothly."

"Aside from that, Caiyong is feeling rather uncomfortable. She hasn't eaten breakfast and has been vomiting. This worries me a little."

"28th March, sunny."

"Old Chen's excavation team cleared the way ahead. Everyone was delighted and their faces were filled with renewed hope. I am

gratified, and so are my students.”

“Move forward, we have to keep moving forward. I have a feeling that we will definitely make an immense discovery.”

(Blood stains smeared the rest of the entry, making it unreadable.)

“29th March, sunny.”

“We dug up a ‘door.’ At that moment, an ominous feeling came over me and I wanted to turn back. I wanted to ask Caiyong to go back, but she encouraged me to persevere, saying that Lin Minghai is someone who would stop at nothing for his ideals.”

“She gazed at me like I was the only one in her eyes and that look was something I couldn’t refuse. I love her.”

“The excavation will go on.”

“30th March, rainy.”

“We managed to get in, but the door was permanently shut. What lay inside shocked and amazed me. It was a form of architecture we have never seen before. Although old and dirty, it was grander than any other building we had ever seen... Perhaps saying this might be an over exaggeration, but it was even more magnificent than the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor.”

“It doesn’t seem like something that humans could have built.”

“Old Chen, who was leading the excavation team, was even more amazed than I was and immediately sent his students to investigate the structure. However, they came back and said that there wasn’t even a single load-bearing column. Old Chen went crazy and even hit a student on the head with a shovel.”

“It was too chaotic... strange... Everyone was trying to stop the fighting, but it ended up becoming a violent brawl and Old Chen was beaten to death.”

“No one saw who did it, but someone pulled out Old Chen’s tongue.”

“We didn’t have the strength to investigate nor bury Old Chen’s body. His mouth was gaping and his eyes were wide open.”

“At night, I thought to myself that perhaps the reflection in his eyes would reveal the killer’s face, so I went to take a look.”

“Ha, of course that’s impossible. He’s already dead. Only my face was reflected in his eyes.”

“1st April, rainy.”

“We slept in that underground building last night. When I opened my eyes, Caiyong was seated next to me. Seeing me wake up, her first words were, “Lin Minghai, I’m pregnant.”

“The unpleasantness of the past few days was swept away in an instant. I’ve never been so happy before. We’ve been married for two years already, and finally, we are about to have a new addition to our family.”

“No wonder Caiyong had been feeling nauseous all this time. She was pregnant after all.”

“But Caiyong said the door has been closed and we might be trapped here forever. Living together and dying together was rather romantic too.”

“Impossible! I kissed her forehead and comforted her, telling her not to be so pessimistic and that there will certainly be a way out if we keep moving forward.”

“Caiyong nodded and said she would always believe in me. I touched her belly, which was round and bulging, making her look like she was almost five to six months pregnant. When I put my hand on it, I could even feel the baby’s heartbeat.”

“However, our supplies are running low. Rainwater has gotten into the dry food, making it moldy. If things continue, it will just be a dead end.”

“Fortunately, Old Chen said that he had extra dry food that he could share. Now that our team isn’t that large anymore, these dry

goods are enough to go around.”

“There’s truly always a way out when one needs it.”

Chapter 423: Child

“6th April, rainy.”

“My students and I dug with shovels, and finally opened the underground tunnel.”

“This place practically possesses an entire world’s civilization. Now that we’ve come this far, regardless of what the present or future holds, my students and I can die without any regrets.”

“But what about Caiyong and the child? I can’t let them die.”

“Some of my students are acting strange, but I’m becoming increasingly clear-headed. I feel that it isn’t just the magnetic fields that are the problem with this world. Perhaps there exists other stuff that’s affecting us. This is the first time I thought about this sort of issue.”

““Are there ghosts in this world?” I asked Caiyong, and she told me that there aren’t any ghosts in this world. Ghosts are merely things that science cannot yet explain, and science is what humanity relies on.”

“Caiyong can still say something like that in such a situation. She’s truly my wife.”

“Tonight, I will sleep beside my child so that I can be at ease.”

“19th April, rainy.”

“Surviving in this underground palace is extremely difficult, but almost all the food I can prepare is given to Caiyong. She and the child are in good condition.”

“It isn’t easy to prepare food and can only be done at night, or else it will be snatched away by others.”

“Even if they’re all my students, I don’t have a choice. My child has to live... This is my obsession as a father.”

“Fortunately, everyone is still here. With a team of twenty-nine working together, we will definitely be able to find a way out.”

“27th April, rainy.”

“It’s been raining every day since we came down. Mold has gotten in the food, but Caiyong is in good spirits. She seems to have gained weight and looks even cuter.”

“We discussed the child’s name all day long, yet haven’t yet come to a decision.”

“At night, the five of us sat around the campfire. For some reason, the darkness here seems to be capable of engulfing light. Even if we burned bones, clothes, or other things, the fire didn’t seem to blaze brighter. It could only illuminate a small area around us.”

“Caiyong told everyone to sit back to back and not to turn our backs to the darkness. Everyone agreed, so the five of us leaned against one another.”

“While cheering me up, Caiyong encouraged the others as well.”

“Everyone likes her and respects her as if she’s an angel. I’m very happy, but also a little upset.”

“Caiyong is mine, and so is the child.”

“30th April, rainy.”

“We made it through the night, but Shao Yiwen isn’t doing too well. She kept muttering to herself last night and slept with a back to ‘Him.’ She’s been eaten.”

“Who is ‘He’?”

“I’m very puzzled, but Yiwen’s left arm and entire back was bitten off by those things. Her viscera spilled out of the gashes and her intestines came loose. Her back is covered by bloody holes as if it were a wasp nest that’s covered in pus and blood.”

“However, we can’t stop. We have to keep going and find a way

out.”

“Xu Xiangdong is also acting very weirdly. He keeps rambling that he’s found some important documents and is scribbling random symbols in his notebook. He even claims that it’s the written language of a kingdom of elves.”

“My other student, Duan Xuemin, disagreed with his opinion, and Xiangdong even tried to physically hit Xuemin.”

“He’s gone completely insane and I don’t know what’s wrong with him. He suddenly went blind, and his eyes were reduced to two dark empty sockets. Xiangdong keeps saying that ‘He’ is by his side and can even feel ‘His’ breathing.”

“Continuing to bring him along might pose danger to Caiyong, the child, and Xuemin.”

“We convinced him to stay and look after Shao Yiwen, and then we left him behind. It’s a rather cruel thing to do, but even more things will be destroyed if we persist with this slight sense of morality.”

“Now, it’s just me, Caiyong, and my student Duan Xuemin.”

“27th April, rainy.”

“It’s still raining, and it hasn’t stopped once. The three of us haven’t yet found a way out, and to be honest, it’s a bit hopeless.”

“But I can’t show it in front of Caiyong and the child. Today, I joked with Student Xuemin, asking if she had any more food, and she cried from fright.”

“She even said, ‘Please don’t eat me.’”

“Why would I eat her? That silly kid is a real joker. Caiyong even laughed at her joke, and I feel rather hopeful when she laughs.”

“I put my hand on Caiyong’s stomach and felt the child’s kicks. This is my first child, so I have to protect him or her at all costs.”

“I love ‘Him.’”

“28th April, rainy.”

Xuemin disappeared.

“29th April, rainy.”

“It’s just me and Caiyong now. A piece of my calf was bitten off, but I can’t feel any pain at all.”

“I’m in a blurry daze all day long. Caiyong says it’s due to long-term confinement and malnutrition. Plus, the rainwater is sticky and reeks. Drinking this rainwater for prolonged periods makes me feel like vomiting.”

“But Caiyong is still doing fine. She doesn’t seem to be in any discomfort and her belly is really huge.”

“She’s about to give birth, and her hands and feet are starting to swell. Moving about is rather inconvenient for her.”

“Caiyong and I wrote down many names for the child, but we haven’t decided yet. I hope for a daughter, but Caiyong wants a son.”

“If it’s a daughter, she will definitely look like Caiyong.”

“I’ve thought of a dozen names, but Caiyong has only given one boy’s name. I don’t particularly fancy it, but it will do as long as Caiyong is happy.”

(A list of names were written below)

“Caiyong and I have been rushing toward a certain destination. It’s strange. Where exactly are we going?”

“1st May, rainy.”

“There’s a lot less meat on my legs and I can already see bone. I can no longer walk and have to move around by crawling.”

“I was covered in mud from all the crawling, but Caiyong didn’t mind. She kissed me and dragged me along.”

Without any expression, Lin Jie turned the page, but the empty page roused him.

Is that all...? Lin Jie continued to flip through and found a page close to the end that was almost fully stained with blood. Lin Jie extended his finger, gently touching the page, and he could feel the pen tip's indentation.

He took a deep breath, picked up the notebook and held it up to the fuel lamp. Through the light from the flame, he made the best of what he could out of those red and messy strokes.

"We are here, Caiyong and I finally arrived."

"But, is this hell?"

"A massive palace made from putrid flesh. Various strange creatures, including human limbs and body parts, are all around us. Whatever we step on produces a squelching sound of flesh and blood."

"Countless pairs of black and red eyes are densely distributed throughout the palace, staring at us fixedly the moment we enter."

"Small tentacles, as thick as a baby's wrists, sway aimlessly like wriggling maggots."

"A huge lump of flesh, shaped like a baby, is connected to countless blood vessels like the threads of a spider's web, blooming within a yellow translucent blister."

"It was a demon... A demon!"

"I pulled Caiyong and ran as fast as I could, but these tunnels made of viscera and flesh seemed never ending."

"The entire world was covered in red, with all kinds of strange sacrificed humans, their limbs and features twisted and deformed, like an endless vortex."

"They were still muttering nonstop and shouting my name. They were alive and chasing us. People who looked like they had feet all

over their bodies and a man with only skin were also chasing us. Some were warped into rope shapes, while others had twisted orifices... They surrounded us.”

“There was also the deceased Old Chen and all of the students, their bodies torn and rotting...”

“We couldn’t stop, or else we would become like them.”

“However, Caiyong fell. She was about to give birth.”

“I tried to help her deliver, but the baby wouldn’t come out, no matter what! I am useless. Child, why won’t you come out? Why do you have to make your mother suffer so much...”

“Caiyong was in so much pain, and my heart hurt so much too.”

“It hurt so much, so, so much...”

“I was covered in blood, and so was Caiyong.”

“Eventually I did it. The baby came out covered in blood and crying incessantly. However, he didn’t look like me or Caiyong.”

“...He looked like the baby in the yellow, translucent blister.”

“But this is my child. My only child.”

“I can’t find Caiyong anymore, but I had to take my child and leave. This is my duty and fate as a father.”

“Just as Caiyong had guessed, it’s a boy. I’ve given him the name Lin Jie. Jie as in Medium.” (T/L: Original text is 媒介, Mei Jie which means medium, as in a means of which something is communicated or expressed)

The journal ended here. Lin Jie leaned against the counter, staring fixedly at his own shadow in the dim light.

In this empty bookstore, Lin Jie felt as if he had returned to the time before Mu’en arrived, or even further back, to when he first stepped into the bookstore three years ago.

Chapter 424: Sis Ji Zhixiu

Tick-tock, tick-tock.

Mu'en had specially installed a clock in the new bookstore, allowing her to feel the passage of time clearly.

The crisp ticks echoed throughout the bookstore, making the large space feel empty and bringing about an indescribable sense of eerie chill. However, that wasn't the reason why there weren't any customers in the store.

The branch in the Central District had been open for more than ten days, but unfortunately, it was rather deserted.

This situation was different from what Mu'en and Vincent had guessed. They originally imagined that there would be a large number of customers, and via the dissemination of the bookstore, they would select a group of high-level followers of Boss Lin.

Unfortunately, there weren't any customers at all.

Mu'en, who possessed the power of the moon, naturally knew why.

But it didn't matter because their goal wasn't here. Seeds had already been planted amongst the true upper echelons of Norzin, and they were just waiting for everything to begin.

"Seems like Ji Zhixiu has completely become a chosen of Boss Lin," muttered Mu'en, her voice echoing in the quiet bookstore.

As the Witch of the Night, possessing the power of 'Eyes of the Moon,' there was hardly anything in Norzin that could escape her gaze, including Ji Zhixiu's movements.

"Becoming a race... I still imagined that she would increase the number of Boss Lin's followers by disseminating those books. However, I never expected her to actually gather everyone through the auction and select suitable followers, taking advantage of when

the spirit of those transcendents was weakened to take control of them.”

Suddenly, a resonant and familiar voice echoed in the bookstore, voicing aloud all of Mu'en's thoughts. Right away, Mu'en knew who it was without even turning around.

Vincent, with his golden hair and cheek-length sideburns, looked just like a kindly priest.

“In a way, Ji Zhixiu has chosen the most qualified and suitable followers for Boss Lin and sorted enough substitutes for herself, which is truly clever.”

“Of course.” Mu'en smiled ever so slightly and said, “She's one of those chosen by Boss Lin.”

“Most of the nobles have already become Ji Zhixiu, so it's not a surprise you don't have any customers.” Vincent chuckled as he sat beside Mu'en. “In that case, the Ji father and daughter pair are completely devoted servants of Boss Lin.”

“It is their honor,” replied Mu'en matter-of-factly.

In Mu'en's opinion, becoming the lackeys of Boss Lin was probably the luckiest thing to happen for the Ji pair.

And that was indeed the truth. Without Boss Lin, Ji Zhixiu would have long been dead.

“Now that Ji Zhixiu is doing well, it's time to make a move,” Mu'en said. As the owner of the branch store, she represented Boss Lin's will in a certain sense.

“The Central District...?” Vincent asked with some hesitation.

“It's just Fraxinus, the Witch of Trees, nothing to fear,” said Mu'en as she glanced out toward the window, where a beautiful emerald bird perched outside.

“Witch of Trees... is it really the Witch of Trees?” Vincent murmured in slight surprise.

The emerald bird chirped twice and disappeared from the window ledge.

Ji Zhixiu, who was far away, put down her pen and retrieved the memories from her puppet, the emerald bird.

“Witch of Trees...” Ji Zhixiu muttered under her breath. Then she turned to Ji Bonong. “Let’s get started. This is Lady Mu’en’s command, and her will is Boss Lin’s.”

Ji Bonong raised an eyebrow. He had gained transcendent abilities from Boss Lin’s book, ***Void Palm***, which gave him the power to manipulate the economy and commerce. All it took for the collapse of the monetary and commercial economy was for Ji Bonong to give it a mere thought.

Sabona Palachi was the youngest daughter of the Central District’s noble Palachi Family.

Born and raised in luxury since she was young meant that Sabona had developed occasional haughtiness, but she was smart—as long as she paid attention to her behavior, a little arrogance could show others that she was not one to be trifled with, making those shallow people she looked down on stayed away from her.

Due to her haughtiness, she didn’t have many friends... But Young Miss Ji of Rolle Resource could be considered one.

In Sabona’s eyes, though Ji Zhixiu was born ordinary, she was talented and knowledgeable, with a mysterious background and a great vision for a new era.

Unfortunately, ever since her parents made her learn to dance, Sibona gradually drifted apart from Ji Zhixiu. The governess of the Palachi family often reminded her that the Jis of Rolle Resources were mere merchants with cheap blood and to be used as nothing more than tools. She also said that the good relations between Ji Zhixiu and Sabona was also just to maintain their family position.

However, Sabona didn’t care. She just felt that Ji Zhixiu had exceptional intelligence and was superior to the typical aristocratic

girl that only thought about makeup and luxuries. Being friends with Ji Zhixiu made her feel superior.

For a long time, no, till today, Ji Zhixiu had been like her idol. Sabona wasn't interested in dancing or all other such noble pastimes. Her real dream was to become a transcendent being and not a tool for future marriages.

According to her own investigations, her good friend Ji Zhixiu seemed to have become a powerful transcendent being in recent years. Thus, Sabona thought that she could probably contact her and gain an opportunity to become a transcendent being.

This made her admire Ji Zhixiu even more, and Sabona would occasionally carve Ji Zhixiu's name on the corner of her desk in secret to inspire herself.

After training for several days at the dance academy in the outskirts of the Central District, Sabona finally returned home.

"Father! Mother!" Clutching her leather suitcase, Sabona pushed open the door and called out. Then she stood still in surprise.

Her father, mother, elder brother, and elder sister were all sitting still around the dinner table, but it wasn't mealtime.

"Father, Mother, I'm home," Sabona said softly, but there wasn't any response.

She turned around and saw the driver who had driven her home sit in place, un-moving like a machine, just like her parents and siblings around the table.

Confused, Sabona raised an eyebrow as she pulled out a chair and sat down carefully at the table as well.

Her parents and siblings had identical smiles on their unblinking faces.

"Father, Mother, what's wrong with you guys?"

"We're fine, my dear Sabona," her parents answered simultaneously

using the same voice.

Sabona: “...”

A vague sense of unease came over Sabona as she glanced all around. The housemaids, the driver, even the black cat and hunting dog, all seemed to have the same gaze and the same expression as they blinked simultaneously and focused on Sabona.

Their mouths had the same slight upward curvature... Even the black family cat.

Sabona sucked in a deep breath and nearly fell off her chair from anxiousness. She stood up quickly and walked toward the door—

—*A transcendent being! Someone’s using transcendent abilities to control my parents!* Sabona had never received any transcendent training; she was ordinary. She quickly rushed toward the door to leave.

“Where are you going, my dear Sabona?” Voices echoed throughout the entire mansion, seemingly coming from everyone. Every voice from every mouth had the same tone.

“Aaah!” Sabona screamed as she tumbled over the carpet.

“Where are you going, my dear Sabona?” Her mother approached her, the curvature of her lips so precise as if it were measured by a ruler. Suddenly, her mother’s face cracked open like a blooming bud—revealing several pieces of flesh—and turned into a disgusting bloody flower.

Before Sabona could even cry out, spores started to build up in the center of the flower.

“Where are you going, my dear sister?” Sabona’s older sister stood behind their mother with the same expression.

“I-I-I’m going to Sis Ji Zhixiu!” Sabona sat on the ground, her legs completely numb, and she mentioned the name of the only transcendent being she knew.

To Sabona's surprise, her mother's head then turned upward. Upon hearing Ji Zhixiu's name, the flesh petals gradually closed up, and her original stiff face reemerged.

In an instant, the face began to loosen up and become lifelike again, like caked dust falling off a cement wall. And as her mother's mouth opened once more, the words she said were, "What do you want to find me for, Sabona?" Ji Zhixiu's cheery voice resonated from Sabona's mother's mouth.

"Ji-Ji—Aahhhhh!" Sabona's eyes widen in shock and she covered her mouth in surprise. Still screaming, she got up from the ground and dashed out of the house.

Ji Zhixiu, donning the shell of Sabona's mother, tilted her head as she watched the stumbling girl in bafflement.

Sabona rushed out of the gates. As an aristocratic daughter, she rarely set foot on dirt, yet now, she was stumbling and falling every few steps. Her knees and elbows were bleeding, but the fear had made her impervious to the pain.

She wanted to head to the Central Police Unit, the place where her father worked. The Palachis were the undisputed overlords of the Central Police Unit.

"Help me, help me!" she cried out as she ran.

It wasn't until she was far away from home that she caught her breath and began to sob uncontrollably.

"Father, Mother!" She stood on the street in a daze, but what she witnessed on the streets was even more unbelievable—

Those usually obedient and docile laborers were smashing factories and shops as if possessed. They raised flags high like lunatics, and the rumbling of multiple explosions could be faintly heard in the distance.

The once orderly Central District was now in chaos, like a scene from hell.

Sabona held her head in her arms. All of what had unfolded had instantly shattered her view of the world.

“What is happening...” she murmured to herself as she watched a leading laborer drag a noblewoman out and brutally throw her on the ground.

Sabona’s eyes widened as she recognized that somewhat familiar noblewoman, and she wanted to stop it, but then the leader of those laborers raised his head, revealing a rough face with a delicate smile, the exact smile she had witnessed at her own home.

Ji Zhixiu...

“Aahhh! Aahhh! Aaahhhhh!!!” Sabona shrieked as she kept running.

Sabona ran like a madwoman, but that smile seemed to be everywhere and on the faces of everyone.

Baam—!

Fleeing haphazardly like a headless fly, Sabona ran straight into a burly man.

She looked up and saw the face of a kindly priest. The priest’s smile was gentle, completely different from Ji Zhixiu’s. He held a book titled ***Sun Scripture*** in his hands.

Chapter 425: Eternally Pure

Sabona recognized the person holding *Sun Scripture* . This was the pope of the Sun's Faith, which was currently the most popular religion since the Church of the Dome was dissolved.

—Vincent.

As upper-class folk in the Central District, Sabona's parents naturally had interacted with Vincent. At that time, Sabona wasn't too keen to participate in such activities because the Sun's Faith was a religion that claimed to serve the common people under the banner of equality and fairness.

Unlike the Church of the Dome that colluded with nobles in the past, the extreme purity exuded by the Sun's Faith's zealous followers made her extremely uncomfortable, as if all her inner desires and darkness would be exposed in the sunlight.

But in the end, she still went with her parents because the Sun's Faith's scope of influence was widening, and most of the nobles' industries were affected, so they had to communicate with the Sun's Faith.

"Mr. Vincent, my parents... t-they've gone mad... They've been possessed by Ji Zhixiu. She's a demon! She's a demon! You have to cleanse her!" With no options left, Sabona shouted between uncontrollable sobs, pointing behind herself.

But now, she had no choice.

Vincent smiled at her, causing Sabona to instantly shrink back. She had come to fear smiles, and just seeing one was traumatizing for her.

However, Vincent wasn't like Ji Zhixiu. He reached out and patted Sabona's head, saying, "Don't be afraid, child. The day of judgment has come, and those good or evil will receive their respective consequences.

“Our Lord is about to descend, and the current chaos is the birth pangs before the transformation. Follow me and let us begin the baptism for a more equal, freer, and brighter future... If you are a kind person, then you will be one of us and receive the Lord’s blessings and protection.”

Sabona swallowed hard, her mind buzzing incessantly. Everything that was happening before the very eyes of this noble girl was earth-shattering.

Vincent’s powerful tone made her understand that she didn’t have a choice.

Thus, she could only follow behind Vincent and merge into the crowd.

But now the sounds of gunfire and the chaotic sights on the streets filled her vision.

Sabona was uncertain if she could make it to the Central District Police Unit. She glanced behind Vincent and saw several disciples following behind him, each holding books that made her feel dizzy just by looking at them.

And behind these disciples were several hundreds of poor folk wielding all manner of tools?!

A hint of disgust immediately showed on Sabona’s face. Being born into the nobility meant that the class difference had practically been ingrained in her since her childhood. Therefore, her disdain toward the poor was practically instinctive.

Those dirty, smelly, and lowly poor people were just so repulsive to her!

However, Vincent noticed and looked at her subtly before saying softly, “Do you loathe them, child?”

“Of course! They are the vermin of Norzin, lowly ants. How are they fit to live in the same area as me?”

Sabona was midway through her harsh reply when she suddenly

came to her senses and quickly corrected herself, “No, that’s not what I meant. I didn’t mean it. I must have been controlled by Ji Zhixiu just now. She’s a real demon, please save me!”

Sabona anxiously explained herself, eyes full of panic. She could be considered the smartest of noble young ladies, who were all flower vases, and quickly surmised the situation around her.

These were the poor people revolting against the nobles. She would surely be beaten to death if she expressed disgust toward them. These poor folk were looking for a means to vent their anger.

But as long as she followed them to the Central District Police Unit, where the chiefs were all from her family clan, the armed police would surely clean up all these vermin. At the thought of this, Sabona breathed a sigh of relief.

“Alright. Go stand together with them, good child,” said Vincent with a smile.

Sabona looked at Vincent, nodded, then hid behind the last disciple, drawing a sun with her finger as all of them were, before crossing her hands in front of her chest.

She could smell the sour stench coming from the poor folk which made her gag, but she could only hold back and curse in silence.

Vincent walked in the middle of the Central District street, holding the book titled ***Sun Scripture*** . As he walked, he chanted loudly—

“I lend you my eyes, so you at least briefly see the light...”

Joining the poor folk made Sabona realize that all for the poor folk in the Central District had come due to Vincent’s beckons. Those vermin who were usually rebuked as polluting the air if they approached within ten meters of a noble had a blazing glow in their eyes like sun flares.

Sabona gulped, trembling as she followed the masses reciting after Vincent’s lines from ***Sun Scripture*** .

“...We are born, we walk, eat, love... Everything comes from the

sun, and we praise the sun.”

“The moon’s light comes from the sun, the stars’ light comes from the sun, the color of all things comes from the sun...”

“In this world, all who walk under the sun are equal.”

Under Vincent’s leadership, the poor sang victorious songs, and the workers who had lost their jobs in the Lower District were incited by Ji Zhixiu, trampling through the Central District.

The entire Central District was filled with smoke and chaos as if the end of the world had arrived. The former prosperity and order of Norzin were now replaced by the cruelty of today.

My home... destroyed by all these poor folk... Sabona thought through gritted teeth.

They arrived at the Central District Police Station, and all the police officers had been ordered not to interfere.

Sabona howled inwardly. The chief was her father, but he was being controlled by someone else, so the person giving the orders wasn’t the chief...

She wanted to stand up and speak the truth, but fear and terror overcame her.

It wasn’t just her father, but almost all the aristocrats in the Central District were controlled by Ji Zhixiu. These poorly armed peasants were like a law unto themselves, and even if anyone dared try to put a stop would be killed by them.

Thugs! They are all thugs!

Rage and fear filled Sabona’s heart. These beasts with no civilized manners were not worthy of being called human beings. They were all lowly peasants!

Suddenly, the procession stopped, and Sabona looked to the front. They had managed to reach the Central District Park without any obstacles. With gritted teeth, Sabona once more felt a glimmer of

hope.

That was because the Central District Park was the most noble place in the entire Central District, and it had Norzin's most powerful weapon.

Sabona wiped away her tears. She felt like a drowning person who had found a log to hold on and was overjoyed. The big shots in the Central District's central administration would definitely stop all of this and return everything to normal.

Then, she would send all these lowly people to the arena to become fodder for the beasts as entertainment!

Vincent turned around indifferently and eyed the procession before saying, "Those who can come to my side and listen to the grace have been illuminated by the holy light. Unfortunately, however, I have discovered something. There is a girl who is a despicable noble. Her mind is full of filthy thoughts. Her once pure and flawless heart has been contaminated by the class consciousness of the nobility. Therefore, she is no longer a child... but an enemy.

"Before we charge into the Central District Park, we shall use her blood as an offering to the sun and justice..."

Vincent's voice wasn't loud, but everyone in the crowd heard it, including Sabona.

Sabona suddenly realized that all those around had moved away, forming a circle around her.

Vincent was looking at her expressionlessly.

"No... no... I didn't... I'm innocent, I followed you guys. Don't come near me. My father is the chief of the Central District Police Unit. You will die a miserable death if you dare touch me!"

But it was no use. The poor surrounded her, staring at her with their wild, frenzied eyes.

She stumbled back and cried out hysterically, "Don't come near me, you damned poor! Why haven't you died yet! You pigs, all of you

should just die! Filthy things like you shouldn't exist in Norzin!"

Sabona's face twisted in fury as she picked up a crude weapon that had been dropped on the ground and tried charging toward the crowd.

But at that moment, a holy flame fell from the sky, engulfing her in raging fire. The flames licked at her skin and instantly burned her to a crisp. Excruciating pain made her cry out in agony, and her carefully maintained skin became completely charred.

Her face was twisted with flames, and her flesh turned to ashes. Her body became like a writhing worm, struggling in pain, but she could no longer make a sound.

Vincent watched her coldly and recited a silent prayer.

"Her soul will return to its most pure, primitive state and return to the embrace of our Lord. This way, she will be eternally pure."

Central District, central administration, adjudication bureau
beneath the Inverse Tree.

Barr, the oldest in the adjudication bureau, frowned as he watched his worried compatriots. Even before Norzin was established, he had pledged his loyalty to the witch, gaining near immortality and living till this day.

As the oldest among them, Barr didn't have any bit of selfishness. He sat beneath the Inverse Tree all day, and even his family didn't exist. Almost everyone else viewed him as part of the Inverse Tree itself.

"It's definitely the bookstore owner's scheme!" the combative Agathare exclaimed with clenched fists.

"It's Ji Zhixiu," Asmodeus said hoarsely. "We underestimated Ji Zhixiu. She got control of most of the nobles at the auction, but we had been none the wiser."

The bunch of old folk in the adjudication bureau started arguing nonstop which gave Barr a headache.

“Silence! Whether it’s Ji Zhixiu or Vincent of the Sun’s Faith, they are both lackeys of Lin Jie.” Barr supported himself with a cane and hollered angrily, which made everyone calm down.

“We have to awaken the witch,” Barr said softly.

“But the Wall of Fog...”

“There’s no ‘but.’ If the Central District central administration is gone, maintaining the Wall of Fog would be useless,” Barr muttered, a hint of killing intent glinting in his murky eyes.

Blythe, the youngest among them, who was still often referred to as a child by Barr, scoffed silently when he heard this. He slowly got up from his chair, having been sitting in the corner without anyone noticing his actions.

He walked toward the fruit under the inverted tree and looked at the slumbering Witch of Trees through the slit on the fruit.

The green-haired maiden seemed as if she was having a beautiful dream.

Blythe sighed. “Did you hear that, Fraxinus? You thought you were guarding the tree that protected the Azir continent, but in their eyes, you are merely a tool for these so-called leaders.”

Fraxinus’ fair eyelids twitched slightly when she heard the somewhat familiar voice.

Chapter 426: The Truth Of Secret Rite Tower

Secret Rite Tower.

Secret Rite Tower headquarters located in the Central District was like an impregnable fortress.

Secret Rite Tower was the second tallest building in Norzin and had a grandiose exterior with the purpose of displaying the glory of knights. Situated at the top of this building was Secret Rite Tower's council of elders.

Greg had only come here once previously, when he succeeded Vivian and was promoted to a Great Radiant Knight. He never imagined that he would be back here a second time so soon.

Greg followed the council of elders' guard into the elevator which started ascending. Through the elevator's transparent glass, amid the busy knights performing their respective duties, Greg caught a glimpse of red.

—Melissa.

Greg frowned. Perhaps he wouldn't ever return after this. If so, it was crucial that he conveyed the information to Melissa.

The council of elders had moved too fast. He had merely uncovered a clue and was taken away immediately.

Or perhaps, I was already being watched the moment I started looking into Darya...

Greg couldn't help but blame himself for his foolishness. Ever since Secret Rite Tower used Joseph to win over Boss Lin before ultimately letting him die, Greg had gradually lost his faith in the organization.

If even the most admirable knight couldn't entrust his back to his comrades, what was there to say about the knight spirit?

Greg was desperately trying to figure out how to convey the information he had to Melissa but was eventually at his wits' end. If it were that simple, Secret Rite Tower would not have guarded the secret for so many years.

He could only pray deeply to Boss Lin. That existence was the only true god.

There was a chime as the elevator arrived at the top floor and the doors slowly opened, casting a metallic glare into Greg's eyes. Apart from Secret Rite Tower, there wasn't any other meeting room in Norzin that had such a full metal construction.

Greg used to think that the meaning of these metal was to showcase the nobility and power of knights, but now it seemed more like an armor for the aging authority wielders to hide in.

Greg gazed toward the circular silver conference table, which was located on a raised platform.

Seated at the table were three old men dressed in knight armor. The one sitting at the highest position was the founder of Secret Rite Tower—Valace Finidas.

Greg walked toward that old man, and the shifty guard who had escorted him here disappeared into the shadows.

Greg gave a respectful smile and immediately knelt before Valace.

Valace seemed to have a lifespan of more than a thousand years. As the supreme leader of the entire Secret Rite Tower, he basked in respect and was almost a part of Secret Rite Tower's glory.

There seemed to be a mysterious charm about him at all times, and he possessed that knight spirit that countless others pursued. This was the man that had made Secret Rite Tower the largest organization in Norzin.

"I have come at your call, Sir Valace," Greg said sincerely.

Valace nodded. “My good knight, please rise.”

Greg obediently got up and looked at Valace, the latter expressionless, like a thousand-year-old tortoise that had lived too long.

“Let’s get straight to the point. You’re investigating Darya’s case, aren’t you?”

Greg shuddered. He took a deep breath and nodded. He hadn’t expected that Valace would even avoid beating around the bush. However, Greg didn’t dare disobey, lest he be killed by the guards in the next moment. Thus, he answered truthfully.

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Mhmm.” Valace sighed. Greg rarely ever noticed any other other expression in that old face of his.

“You are just like Vivian, but I expected as much since Vivian also looked into Darya’s death.

“Darya’s death was not a natural one.”

While Greg had already anticipated it, he was still slightly surprised when he heard this.

He was already thoroughly disappointed with Secret Rite Tower, but hearing this sentence made Greg feel as if everything he knew about the world was crumbling.

“Because Darya, mother of Melissa, wife of Joseph, and Great Radiant Knight of Secret Rite Tower, chose to die.”

Greg, who was lost in thought, immediately looked up in surprise upon hearing this.

However, Valace fell into a long silence. After some time passed, he finally said, “Now, let me tell you a story from long ago.”

Valace let out a long sigh and began. “Long ago, when humans on the Azir continent were nothing more than a food source for

monstrous elves, an evil god once descended.”

Greg’s breath became heavy, and a kind of terrible anticipation started to fill his heart.

“That evil god destroyed the entire era of elves, whereas humans were able to survive under the protection of the Primordial Witch. Humanity was incredibly fortunate and achieved their own success, but in our era, we all know that the evil god only fell asleep and hasn’t yet truly disappeared.”

Valace’s voice was raspy, and each mention of the evil god made Greg shudder.

“If the evil god wasn’t removed, then the future of humanity will also be destroyed like those elves. So, about a thousand years ago, when I was still young, I sought a group of knights and decided to kill the evil god to safeguard the future of humanity.

“I wasn’t the strongest among my compatriots, but I was both the luckiest and unluckiest one. My compatriots and I were corrupted by that evil god during the process of slaying it, and all my compatriots died, while I got this sad, decaying body that aged but not dying.”

“!!!”

“Nevertheless, I inherited their spirit and established Secret Rite Tower. This is the origin of our very organization.”

Greg couldn’t help but shiver when he heard the words, ‘that evil god,’ and the image of a young man who exuded the scent of books, calm, powerful, and terrifying, appeared in his mind.

As if that image resonated with the evil god that Valace spoke of.

Greg asked with a trembling voice, “Did you see that evil god?”

After hearing this, Valace actually laughed. Laughter came from his decaying mouth even though his lips hadn’t moved at all.

“No, we didn’t even see its shadow. We were completely wiped

out.”

Greg:

Although Valace had never seen the evil god and couldn't confirm if it was Boss Lin, Greg quickly snapped out of the story and asked with a frown, “So... what does this have to do with the Great Radiant Knight Darya?”

“The original purpose and mission of Secret Rite Tower has never once changed,” said Valace bitterly. “Our goal is to defeat the evil god, and the person among us most likely to defeat the evil god is Joseph.

“This wasn't just understood by you and me, but Darya as well. However, after marrying Darya, Joseph began to slack off. He neglected justice and the rules of knights.

“Darya was just a pawn we arranged to ensure that Joseph's excellent blood-line would be passed down, but she had a serious impact on Joseph's true mission.”

Greg stared at the old man incredulously.

“So, she had to die,” Valace said.

“Just for this reason?” Greg was dumbfounded.

“Yes, and before she died, I spoke with her and told her the true purpose of Secret Rite Tower, so she chose to die voluntarily.”

Greg suddenly found it difficult to breathe. Although this truth was shocking, he still had many doubts.

If it were for the sake of humanity's future, as well as her duty as a wife, mother, and Great Radiant Knight, perhaps Darya was indeed informed of her death in advance of her death.

But what Greg really found hard to believe was—

“If Knight Joseph was the great hope of Secret Rite Tower and humanity, why did Tower abandon him!” Greg asked furiously.

“Because Melissa is also excellent, and Joseph was close to his limit, yet he still falls far short,” replied Valace without a hint of emotion.

“Nonsense, you were clearly trying to gain favor with Boss Lin!” Greg’s anger overwhelmed him, and he forgot himself for a moment. He felt that injustice for Darya and Joseph.

“And you knew that Boss Lin is that evil god, right?” Greg growled through gritted teeth.

Upon hearing this, Valace’s eyes widened as he stared at Greg in disbelief.

Chapter 427: All Of It Was Deception

Chapter 427: All of It Was Deception

“You actually... knew?!” Shock and embarrassment filled Valace’s aged face.

All he said before was meant to make Greg believe in the noble mission of Secret Rite Tower. However, he hadn’t expected that Greg already knew the truth. This meant that all his previous lies were exposed... and he had merely been dancing around like a clown.

How couldn’t he not be angry and annoyed?!

Greg was in his own world after unleashing the heartfelt anger that he had.

How... How could he say that!

Greg had always been an honest and straightforward person. Hearing about the fate of Joseph, the knight he admired the most, being all a result of a Secret Rite Tower scheme thoroughly shook him.

Thus, he couldn’t help but speak up for Joseph. But all this was based on his own speculation that the bookstore owner was the evil god from what had been said earlier.

But, Valace’s reaction... Is Boss Lin really ‘that evil god’ which destroyed the era of elves?

“You’re messing with me!” Valace growled as he glared at Greg lividly. He tried to get up, causing his baggy, decaying skin all over his body to tear like fabric.

But he couldn’t break free from his decaying body. The shiny silver

armor fell off him, revealing his rotting body with organs visible. There were even maggots gnawing on that putrid flesh, which made Greg's scalp tingle in fright.

Although Valace's body was decayed and reeking, it was also constantly growing. Death and immortality coexisted in him.

But in truth, Greg was really uncertain if 'that evil god' was Boss Lin...

In his eyes, the bookstore owner was undoubtedly a powerhouse. While his position was a confusing one and his stance toward humans was neither friendly nor hostile, all signs indicated that he seemed to have aspirations toward changing.

Those things that were unfair and unkind...

What Greg had said about the 'evil god' was just a bold guess based on his thoughts and current clues, and partly because he didn't really believe Valace's so-called truths.

At the very least... The battle at 67th Avenue was clearly a trap set by Valace to force Boss Lin to make a move and see if Joseph could get the former's attention.

It had only been a conjecture before, but Valace's reaction meant that Greg was spot on.

Greg met Valace's gaze. "So what if I'm messing with you? What right do you have to stand your ground, liar?! If Boss Lin is an evil god, then everything you've done so far has been intentional. All your talk about wanting to defeat the evil god was fake, you guys are just willing to become the evil god's lackeys!"

"Liar? Lackey?" Valace got up from his chair. He was incredibly tall, but also extremely hunched, and his skeleton-like appearance was frightening.

He roared with maniacal laughter, "Ha-ha-ha...! How ridiculous. You don't understand anything at all. That's a god, a true god. Only 'He' has eternal power, and that power, even if only a tiny fraction of it could be harnessed... is way more powerful compared to

anything humans can achieve!”

...Harness?!

Greg caught on to this word, then had a bad feeling. An ominous foreboding came to him, and he realized that Valace had already raised a hand and grasped a long sword from the void.

Krackk—!

Just as Greg was feeling uneasy, a metallic sound hit his ears as a sharp blade pierced through Valance, from behind his knight throne.

Greg was stunned.

Valance had a look of disbelief as his aged shell shattered like glass. A cold emotionless voice came from behind the throne—

“So it really was you people that forced my mother to die!”

Greg immediately recognized this familiar voice. “Melissa?!”

Greg was both surprised and relieved to see the red-haired lass emerge from behind the tall throne.

“It’s me, Greg,” said Melissa firmly, her sword imbued in flames, and the scorching temperatures made the blade glow red.

After answering Greg’s question, Melissa didn’t continue speaking with him and instead turned to the dying Valace and declared, “This talk of fighting the darkness... It’s all fake. Secret Rite Tower was never created to protect anyone.”

Melissa continued, indifferently, “More than a thousand years ago, you and your compatriots didn’t enter the Lower District to eradicate the evil god for the sake of humanity’s future.”

Melissa pulled her blade out of Valace’s decaying body. The latter’s body spasmed like a dead fish as black, foul smelling blood gushed out of the hole in his chest.

“You established Secret Rite Tower to seize the power of the evil god and to seek the path in becoming a true god yourselves,” Melissa revealed the cruel truth.

“The so-called expedition was just a bunch of greedy and selfish people gathering together, defying the orders of the witch, and fighting in the darkness in a bid to gain immense power.

“The so-called secret rite was the ceremony to capture that divine power. You set up this ritual in the underground capital to capture the infant divinity that was born with time... But with your strength, just approaching was extremely difficult, and your so-called ritual was destroyed and easily torn apart like a soaked piece of paper.

“You suffered heavy losses in that ritual and became the only fortunate survivor but unable to control your own body. Yet you thirsted more for the power of the evil god. Thus, you twisted your goals, established the so-called ‘Knights’ and Secret Rite Tower, fabricated your own story, and created the spirit of knights that everyone pursues.

“How utterly ridiculous.”

Melissa glared angrily and pointed her sword straight at Valace. Through gnashed teeth, she growled, “Everything was all a deception! My mother saw through it and was silenced by you. And like her, there are hundreds of people who inexplicably disappeared in Secret Rite Tower, or even more!

“But the greatest deception is the cursed sword. You hand over this cursed sword to the strongest Great Radiant Knight of each generation just so that they can die at the most appropriate time for the most appropriate reason!

“This way, they will never have the chance to discover the truth and will always be your puppets! Just like how my father once was!”

The turn of events left Greg stunned, and he wasn’t able to speak for a moment. However, from her tone, it didn’t seem like Melissa

was speaking untruths. Thus, Greg's brain was in great turmoil, shaken by the truth.

"It's... not like that at all!" Valace howled as he writhed in his seat like a fish drying up on the beach. His body had long been dead, but his soul was bound in this rotting body, existing miserably for all eternity.

"It's not like this... I didn't fail, my ritual was successful!" Valace raved. "I am a generational genius that bounded the god underground, but I never expected..."

"I never expected..." Valace croaked hoarsely, "that 'god' would be reincarnated and resurface through a vessel, via my ritual..."

"I could have become a god... I am a god!" Valace exclaimed in a crazed fashion.

Melissa frowned. She thought Valace would refute his crimes, yet she never imagined this madman to argue that his ritual had been right.

A madman! A real lunatic! The fact that this person who had always been Secret Rite Tower's spiritual pillar caused the death of both her parents made Melissa feel nauseous.

At the same time, although Melissa hadn't yet reached Supreme-rank, she had control of her mother's knowledge and her father's Supreme-rank power. The flames tempered on her blade ignited a blazing fire on Valace's decaying yet immortal body.

"Melissa!" Greg cried out hurriedly. "You mustn't do this. Once Valace dies, you will become the enemy of the entire Secret Rite Tower. It isn't worth it!"

"I'll do it. Let me do it. You can kill me afterward. This way, you'll have a chance to stand at a higher position and seek revenge for Teacher Joseph..."

"Do you know? All this was what my father told me." Melissa sighed.

“Mr. Joseph?!” Greg exclaimed in incredulity. “He’s still alive?”

Melissa glanced at the burning Valace and clenched her fist. “No, my father is dead, but the flames never die. All his power became his will that he left by my side.

“But I couldn’t comprehend it on my own. Fortunately, I went to see Boss Lin, and he gave me a book— ***Will of Fire*** .”

Flames enveloped Melissa as she said resolutely, “It was this book that helped me completely understand the Supreme-rank power left by my father. I also learned about his past, future, as well as the truth of Secret Rite Tower.”

“It’s actually like this?” Greg was stunned. *It turns out that everything... is all a part of Boss Lin’s plans.*

Melissa didn’t refute, instead choosing to watch the burning Valace. At least she was halfway through her revenge. Now, all that remained was to find the surviving remains of Wilde.

“Melissa,” Greg regained his composure and said, “We have to leave Secret Rite Tower immediately. Although what you said was the truth, we don’t have actual evidence. Secret Rite Tower is still Valace’s domain. The other elders and knights won’t let us be.”

After hearing this, Melissa pursed her lips, nodded firmly, and took a final glance at Valace’s rotting body which had turned into ashes.

Just as they had turned and ran to the elevator, the alarm went off!

The shrill blare of the siren echoed throughout Secret Rite Tower. Melissa tightened her grip on her long sword, her red hair fluttering in flames, and she said, “We have to fight and kill our way out. I no longer care about anyone else anymore. Such a Secret Rite Tower should never have existed.”

“No...” Greg was about to argue with Melissa when he heard a familiar, sinister chortling from behind him.

Greg widened his eyes and turned back, only to see another old man that had been sitting at the conference table slowly stand up

and reveal a smile that Greg was all too familiar with.

“Valace...?” Greg exclaimed in shock.

“Melissa, you are as foolish as your mother and father!” Valence slowly lifted himself up.

“How are you...” Melissa’s pupils shrank.

“How am I still alive?” Valace interrupted Melissa and sneered.

“You underestimated me, who made the ritual to capture the evil god, too lightly... However, I really have to thank you.”

Valence slowly twisted and hobbled toward Melissa like he was getting used to this new body for the first time.

“I, who was corrupted by the evil god, gained eternal life but was also forever imprisoned in this decaying body. I tried every possible way to destroy this body, made countless puppets of myself, and sought to be reincarnated, but that body was both rotting and immortal. I simply had no way of destroying it.

“It was thanks to you. Your Supreme-rank flames ended up thoroughly burning up that body of mine.”

Melissa stared in disbelief.

Valace glanced at his own body with a look of crazed delirium.

“After close to a thousand years of imprisonment, today, I finally...”

Melissa didn’t wait for him to finish, turning into a raging flame and charged. However, Valace, the founder of Secret Rite Tower and a powerhouse closest to Supreme-rank a thousand years ago, felt no fear.

He revealed a cruel smile.

Chapter 428: Witch's Smile

Chapter 428: Witch's Smile

Melissa's temples throbbed with pain as she struggled to open her eyes, and the blurry scene gradually came into focus.

She felt the restraints on her body and the pain receptors immediately kicked in. She realized that she was bound tightly to a thick branch by a green vine.

And this branch was a part of a massive inverted tree. Melissa opened her eyes wide and saw green all around. This tree stretched and twisted everywhere, like a giant towering over the underground world.

"Where am I?" Melissa frowned and looked around in confusion, spotting Greg beside her who was similarly bound.

Melissa narrowed her eyes and saw a human-sized, emerald-green fruit nearby. At the top was a small opening. A girl with emerald hair was sleeping within it.

This is...

She frowned as she recalled that she and Greg had underestimated Valace. Perhaps Valace had been right. His ritual had bound even an evil god, and after burning the cursed undead body that the evil god had possessed, Valace had completely unleashed his own power.

He wasn't a knight at all but a taboo black magician.

Even teaming up with Greg wasn't enough to defeat Valace. Although Valace had just obtained a new body, it was easy for him to hold them off, and soon other Secret Rite Tower security personnel arrived.

The two were soon captured after making a big commotion.

Damn it... Melissa stamped her foot with all her might. She had been so close to victory. *I'm really too weak. Perhaps I could have won if I was just a little stronger.*

Melissa felt an overwhelming sense of self-reproach at having been captured by Valace.

Meanwhile, she could hear the voice that infuriated her.

Beneath this massive inverted tree, several very aged people, along with Valace in his new body, were gathered.

Melissa no longer struggled against her restraints and quietly listened to their conversation.

“Valace...” the only old man seated on a tree branch called out Valace’s name. “I never imagined that you would one day be able to break the evil god’s curse and come before me alive.”

“Senior Barr, that’s severely underestimating me. However, I indeed never imagined that Joseph’s foolish daughter would be that stupid. He gave his all to pass on his will to his daughter, but she ended up burning the world with the most powerful flame and turning my cursed body to ashes.

“After so many years, soul transfer has finally been used.” Valace revealed a contemptuous smirk, completely different from his usual appearance when he was seated on his knight’s throne.

“Humph,” Asmodeous, the only female in the adjudication bureau, scoffed. “Now that the nobles under Ji Zhixiu as well as the followers of the Sun’s Faith are revolting against the Central District central administration, why hasn’t Secret Rite Tower acted yet?”

“Don’t you forget. We made a covenant previously,” chided Asmodeus.

Valace shook his head. “If I really wanted to break the covenant, I would have come here right after being resurrected. Also, Senior Barr isn’t blaming me either.”

Valace shrugged, but his eyes were wandering, as if he was slightly

fearful deep down.

Barr shook his head slowly and sighed. Valace had indeed been the most powerful black magician a thousand years ago. Even though he was cursed with a constantly decaying body, he had still established Secret Rite Tower and controlled all of the knights.

“That bookstore owner is ‘that evil god,’” Valace said solemnly, his voice slightly quivering when he mentioned the bookstore owner.

While the adjudication bureau had such a conjecture, it had ultimately been just a guess, and a guess for the worst case. Valace’s confirmation caused the entire air of this place to turn ice-cold.

That evil god who had nearly destroyed the entire Azir continent upon ‘His’ arrival... had finally awoken.

Although Valace had been resurrected, he was facing the most precarious situation ever. His arrogance seemed to have been worn down by centuries of imprisonment within that rotting body, but this hard-won ability to allow him to once again stand tall had to be held, regardless of the price.

“I suggest not to go against the bookstore owner,” Valace suddenly said.

Barr knew Valace well. He was the most arrogant and rampant black magician several centuries ago. Now his arrogance seemed to have toned down severely, and there was obvious trepidation every-time the latter mentioned ‘that evil god.’ Even if that fear was well hidden, Barr could still see through him clearly.

This person couldn’t be trusted. However, Barr had seen Valace’s intentions of getting on the bookstore’s good side via Joseph. And all of that currying favor was because of fear.

But regardless of all that toadying, it was useless. ‘That evil god’ would destroy everything; not because of hatred or purpose, but because no one could peek into ‘His’ existence. ‘He’ was simply an existence that trampled over humans as if they were mere ants, and it was certain that the bookstore owner would inadvertently destroy

Norzin.

“Do you have any other suggestions then, Valace?” Barr asked impatiently. “It’s not that we want to go against the bookstore owner. However, it’s Ji Zhixiu and the Sun’s Faith that are coming to us, and behind them stands Boss Lin.”

“The Path of the Flaming Sword. I have a spy planted inside.”

Everyone was stunned when they heard this. They hadn’t expected that Valace, who had been severely immobile for so many years, had actually planted a spy in the Path of the Flaming Sword.

“I will provide the Path of the Flaming Sword with all the information about the bookstore owner and let them deal with him.”

Barr nodded. Regardless of whether the Path of the Flaming Sword could handle it or not, the adjudication bureau would sit back and reap the benefits. After all, the entire Central District central administration was just an empty shell. The truly and only powerful core was the Witch of Trees. However, awakening her would require a lengthy ritual.

The Path of the Flaming Sword could buy the time needed.

As long as the Witch of Trees could intervene, at least...

At least ‘that evil god’ could be put back to sleep.

“Alright then, I’ll leave this matter to you.” Barr nodded. Then he glanced at the two tied up to the tree. “How do you plan on dealing with those two?”

Melissa was surprised. She had finished listening to the entirety of this discussion, but this bunch of ancients seemed to have no qualms about her eavesdropping.

“Keeping them alive would be useful. The girl has inherited Joseph’s will of fire. With some training, she could be able to replicate Joseph’s power.”

This was a Supreme-rank power after all. Had Joseph still been alive, he would definitely be ranked among the top five in Azir.

“Not bad,” Barr finally felt a little pleased about something. He turned to a fellow member of the adjudication bureau. “Cadila, you happened to have the power to tweak people’s memories and control them.”

“Got it, Lord Barr.” Cadila understood and arrived at Melissa’s side in no time.

Melissa gritted her teeth, and an immense flame instantly ignited within her body. This was a power that could supposedly burn everything, yet it was completely absorbed by the verdant vines in an instant.

Melissa was very surprised. Cadila sneered, then placed a hand on top of Melissa’s head.

The red-haired girl struggled to no avail and desperately threw her head from side to side. Then, she saw the emerald green girl, who was lying silently in the fruit’s center... open her eyes.

Melissa saw the white-as-snow eyes of the girl known as the Witch of the Tree looking straight back at her silently with a calm, cold smile on her lips, like the chilliest of winter days.

Chapter 429: Duan Xuemin

Chapter 429: Duan Xuemin

“So... what are chives?” A frowning Franca muttered as her slender fingers slid over the colorful pages of the book. She couldn’t help feeling confused.

Ever since she bought this book, *1000 Classic Home-dishes (The Complete Colored 365 Days Edition)*, at the Ji Family’s auction, Franca had hardly left the house as she spent all her time studying recipes day after day.

However, some of the stuff in this recipe book was a little difficult to understand.

For example... chive dumplings.

Franca flipped through various books but couldn’t find any vegetable called chives.

“From the pictures, it looks a little like black hair grass...” Franca pursed her lips, feeling a little creeped out.

The story of black hair grass dates back to more than a thousand years ago where a type of huge monstrous creature lived underground. These monsters were covered in thick mucus and fleshy, white mouths. They fed on the rotting corpses of other beasts, and a type of grass grew on their bodies that looked like black hair.

The humans in that age fed the corpses of their loved ones to these creatures, then collected the grass for their own consumption.

With rare curiosity, Franca searched for information in her own extensive library to verify whether the black hair grass and chives were the same thing. And in the end, she did come across a visual depiction of a monster covered in mouths.

The densely packed mouths with long tongues sticking out on them were on a pillar of flesh at least two stories high.

Eww... Franca felt disgusted.

But these chive dumplings looked really delicious, and chives probably weren't the same thing as black hair grass.

Franca sighed and continued flipping through the thick recipe book, finally coming across a dish—white cut chicken.

There weren't too many things needed, and the recipe was simple, with the main ingredient being chicken.

"Hmm... A southern dish, with a beautiful appearance, golden skin and white flesh. Tender, delicious, with an exceptionally fresh and delicious taste, very appetizing." Franca's delicate hand slid across the page, then she stopped at the word 'southern.'

Southern? Where is the south? Franca wondered, then muttered to herself, "In any case, the south should probably be very far away."

Franca was born into a noble family of white magicians, and as the eldest daughter of that family, she wasn't allowed to freely go out on her own, so the farthest she had been was to the Central District Park.

As a noble family of white magicians, the Curtis Family had extremely strict house rules for their members. Moreover, their family had a reputation for their research on celestial bodies and white magic, which was conducted on a secluded mountain top, far outside the Central District.

This family was known for their pride and placed great importance on their social status and academic research. But in truth, they were isolated from the Central District's power hierarchy due to their antiquated ways. However, the Curtis Family seemed more than happy for it to remain this way.

As the heiress of the Curtis Family, Franca didn't have many opportunities to go out, but she was actually very interested in the bookstore owner that was cooperating with the Ji Family.

Since he sold the book, he probably knows a great deal about its contents, right? Perhaps he's really knowledgeable on this matter.

The dishes in this book are probably much better than what Norzin has to offer. There are more than a dozen ways to cook just chicken alone. How amazing.

There's no way the bookstore owner would possibly sell this book if he doesn't understand all this.

I'll definitely find a chance to go see the bookstore owner. But before that, I'll try making this white cut chicken , mused Franca as she got up from her seat.

Franca's father wasn't home today, and Susan the maid that taught Franca on etiquette had moved to a branch family to be a head maid. Thus, Franca would be able to sneakily use the kitchen.

After transcribing the contents of the recipe onto a note and carefully locking the book in her safe, Franca prepared to sneak into the kitchen. But on the way there, she accidentally caught a glimpse of a young woman seated in the living room.

She was on a wheelchair, staring at the flickering candles like a wooden puppet. This woman had an appearance that was rather different from the nobles in Norzin's Central District. With her dark hair, black eyes and slightly yellow skin, she had similar features of a Northern-er, just like Ji Zhixiu and Ji Bonong.

She was also very pretty, with a kind of exotic beauty; otherwise, she wouldn't have given birth to such a beautiful girl like Franca.

Practically no one knew her name, but she was in fact, Franca's mother.

Franca walked over to her wheelchair-bound mother and crouched down in front of her. She was actually surprised that her mother wasn't locked up in the small bedroom in the attic today. Perhaps the recent psychological therapy had helped stabilize her condition.

"Mom, what are you doing here?" Though she knew that her mother was like a block of wood that wouldn't answer, Franca still

smiled brightly and asked her mother, who had never spoken to her before.

“Mom, let me cook for you today! After I’m done cooking, I’ll let Mom try...”

It didn’t seem like there was even any brightness in Franca’s mother’s eyes, and she didn’t even respond.

Franca sighed, feeling a little heartache. Then, she pushed her mother’s wheelchair toward the kitchen while telling her more, “Mom, watch me cook, okay? I’ll make... white cut chicken today! It might not be very tasty, but I promise I’ll ask that bookstore owner for advice. Perhaps I’ll be able to make some chive dumplings next time.”

Franca wiped away tears in her eyes as she told her mother about the dishes with a smile on her face.

After settling her mother near the kitchen’s entrance, she began to work. From plucking and cleaning the chicken, to using her silver pocket watch to time the process, Franca strictly followed every step of the recipe.

“Just... cooking wine? Cooking wine... the note says that it’s a yellow wine? What kind of wine is that? A yellow-colored wine made from glutinous rice? Hmm, I’ve never heard of it, but the method of making and taste of Meika wine seems similar to what’s described here. I should probably be able to use it as a substitute,” Franca muttered to herself as she cooked.

The image of the girl busy cooking reflected in the dull gray eyes of the woman seated at the doorway.

“Cooking success!” Franca lifted the plate with neatly arranged chicken slices on it, closed her eyes, and took a long breath to savor the aroma.

“How fragrant! This is definitely a fragrance that’s never been experienced before in the whole Azir continent!”

Franca turned around gleefully... *Eh, wasn't Mom at the doorway earlier? When did she come in?*

Somehow, Franca's mother had wheeled herself into the kitchen and was looking at her daughter. For a moment, Franca was taken aback.

"Mom?" Franca called out tentatively, and for the first time, there seemed to be some life in her mother's gaze as it slowly shifted from Franca to the dish in the girl's hand.

"...Do you want to try this?" Franca asked probingly. At this moment, her voice was calm, but Franca was turbulent deep down. From her memories since childhood, her mother had only ever been in two states—insane, or wooden.

When insane, Franca's mother would scream and shout in panic as if trapped by great fear, while when she wasn't insane, she would be motionless like a block of wood.

"Just pretend that you don't have such a mother..." This had been what Franca's father and grandfather had told her back then.

And right now was the first and only time Franca had seen her mother like this. A feeling of disbelief swelled in her heart— *if only Mom could answer me now.*

"Do you want to try this?" Franca asked again.

The woman in the wheelchair tilted her head slightly, and her dull, lifeless eyes stared intently at the dish in Franca's hand. Then, she nodded slowly.

Franca's hand holding the plate started trembling. She was excited beyond measure. This was the first time in several decades... that her mother had responded.

Franca quickly placed the plate in front of her mother and handed her cutlery, but her mother took a look at the cutlery and suddenly shook her head.

"What's wrong?" Franca was at a loss as to why her mother was

now declining.

Then, she saw her mother raise a hand, and closed her fingers together as if she were plucking something. The pupils of Franca's mother trembled violently, and her facial muscles were twitching. It seemed like she wanted to say something, but her mouth just kept opening and closing.

She doesn't want a fork and knife ... Franca immediately understood what her mother was trying to say.

With furrowed brows, Franca pondered for a moment. She recalled seeing two stick-like tools in the images within **100 Classic Home-dishes** . She had initially thought they were for stirring and were an essential item, so she had made a pair accordingly.

She hurriedly picked up the pair of thin sticks from the side and handed them to her mother hopefully.

Her mother glanced at the sticks in her hand, and her expression gradually changed. Then, as if by instinct, she started to operate it, trembling, but unwilling to let go. Eventually, after several failed attempts, she picked up a piece of chicken and stuffed it into her mouth.

Franca watched her mother with excitement, as if she was accomplishing something great, and even subconsciously held her breath so as not to cause any disturbance.

As Franca's mother began to chew the food, tears fell from her eyes. For the first time, a bright light burst from her eyes as if a ghost had awakened from the countless dark years within her.

With the dish in her mouth, she said in a strange and hoarse voice, "My name is... Duan Xuemin, I am... from... Shendu... Institute... of Cultural... Relics.

"My teacher... is... Lin... Ming...Hai.

"Next, I will... record... the truth that you all may... never... be able to understand."

This unnamed otherworlder just repeated these few sentences over and over, till she was sobbing uncontrollably.

Chapter 430: Just That?

Chapter 430: Just That?

At the far end of 23rd Avenue, where countless drifters were, an extremely lanky man, much like a bamboo pole, wandered about in a small alley like a ghost.

This street used by drifters and homeless now only had old folks and children. Those young and fitter adults had already been rallied by the Sun's Faith to fight in the Central District.

The motto of Pope Vincent of the Sun's Faith was 'Fight the nobles, Divine the land, and equalize wealth and poverty.' They would have food to eat if they win.

The tall skinny man stopped at the alley of drifters on 23rd Avenue, and he openly scrutinized these wanderers while at the same time attracting the attention of many of them.

Even at the poor and remote 23rd Avenue, the thin man's wide-brimmed hat seemed outdated, but the man wore it really well, making it difficult to gauge its price.

It was obvious he was rich, yet he gave off a fiercely wicked vibe, so no one went up to him to ask for money.

Only when the lanky man turned into an empty alley did he suddenly feel his clothes being grabbed by someone.

He was slightly surprised at first, then turned his head to see a small girl no older than ten, with a face full of dirt and cracked lips—as a whole, utterly shabby. However, one could still see the child's innocent cuteness.

“Uncle, my mother is sick, my father went to the Central District, and me and my mom haven't had any food for days. Could you give me some money, please?” The little girl choked up as tears ran down her face.

The tall and thin man turned around, squatting down to meet the little girl's eye level.

The man was over two meters tall, but he easily bent down and contorted his body to make eye contact with the little girl up to his thigh, a movement that seemed effortless and beyond the ability of an ordinary person.

"I can give you money to cure your mother," the man's voice was unusually hoarse and full of force, his wide-brimmed hat covering the upper part of his nose.

The little girl immediately broke into tears of joy. "Thank you, thank you, Uncle!"

"...Don't thank me too fast." The man slowly raised his hand to gently stroke the edges of his hat. "You should know, everything comes with a price."

Having said that, he gently lifted the brim of his hat, revealing not a pair of ordinary eyes but countless tiny, densely packed holes that were breathing and squirming.

The little girl was momentarily stunned, then followed up with an ear-piercing scream as she stumbled away. But before even taking two steps, she fell to the ground and her body shattered like glass.

"It hurts!" the little girl cried and rolled on the ground, but her body shattered even more as she moved. "Mom, it hurts so much!"

Zadkiel's lips curled up slightly as he pulled down the brim of his hat to cover half of his face once more. With a snide grin, he said, "What a filial child."

Nearly a thousand years had passed, and humanity was still so fragile and greedy.

Being a powerhouse in this world for far too long had made Zadkiel nearly forget the intrinsic nature of humans.

This tall, bamboo pole-like person was called Zadkiel. He wasn't human but was born into this world as a part of the law of

‘equivalent exchange.’

In the entire continent of Azir, besides the four Primordial Witches, there still existed many laws, and Zadkiel was one of them. Unfortunately, although this law existed in human society, it was rarely applied in practice.

Wealth inequality, family background, class conflict... The so-called law of equivalent exchange was the most useless law in the world.

But this didn’t affect Zadkiel, who believed that his birth was to maintain this law. Thus, he had no emotions toward humans.

This mission never ended even after he joined the Path of the Flaming Sword. And according to Michael’s words, when the Path of the Flaming Sword reaches the dream realm, Zadkiel could become a being above all things. And the realization of the equivalent exchange of all things would no longer be empty talk.

It was because of this dream that Zadkiel joined the Path of the Flaming Sword.

Had ‘Haniel’ survived death from the clutches of the bookstore owner? Zadkiel didn’t only have some doubts, but he also wondered what sort of existence the bookstore owner was.

Unlike Michael, Zadkiel sincerely believed that all compatriots within the Path of the Flaming Sword had to work together for them to be victorious. The bookstore owner had made Raziel cease thinking, killed Sandalphon without leaving a corpse, and seriously injured Haniel that she had to replace her body...

Now, the bookstore owner has become Zadkiel’s number one enemy.

After changing bodies, ‘Haniel,’ whose mind seemed to have become extremely active, believed that the main powers under the bookstore owner, Wilde and Joseph, had gone missing. Rolle Resources and the Sun’s Faith were busy with the uprising, while the bookstore owner’s assistant, a girl presumed to be the Goddess of the Night, had been transferred to the Central District.

The undercover agent planted in the Path of the Flaming Sword by Secret Rite Tower suddenly revealed himself and provided a lot of information pertaining to Boss Lin.

It was now a great opportunity for the Path of the Flaming Sword to join forces to take down the bookstore owner.

Such opportunities were fleeting, but Michael was still cautious enough to let Zadkiel come personally to test the bookstore owner's true strength.

And this was the real reason why Zadkiel had shown up here.

The little girl turned into a pile of minced meat, no longer capable of breathing. Zadkiel pretended to sigh compassionately. "There's no need to worry anymore. Your mother has been cured." Then he chuckled. "But I have also accepted your price."

"Little Mary!"

A loud male voice suddenly resounded. Zadkiel frowned as he heard the man continue calling out.

"Little Mary, where are you? Uncle Joseph has brought some delicious food and medicine for your mom. It's for the favor you did helping pass on the message to Uncle previously," the man called out affectionately.

"Hmm?" Zadkiel tilted his head. "Joseph?"

The footsteps of the new arrival came to the adjoining alley, and Zadkiel could even feel that scorching sensation.

A burly, plainly dressed, middle-aged man eventually appeared at the entrance of this alley, and his footsteps halted at the sight of Zadkiel.

It was Joseph.

His gaze shifted away slowly from Zadkiel to the pile of minced flesh and blood beside the latter.

Joseph froze on the spot as an eyeball rolled to his feet, covered in mud.

He lowered his head and stared blankly at the gemstone-like eyeball.

Mary had been a bright girl, who obediently and cleverly accomplished whatever Joseph asked of her. She loved to read and write, and would even help Joseph convey some hints to his daughter Melissa.

She could also be rather mischievous sometimes. Joseph asked that she address him as uncle, but the little girl would always call him gramps. Joseph would pretend to be mad, but he actually got along very well with this child.

She was also the main reason why Joseph came everyday to bring warmth to the community.

This girl and other homeless children and living with others equally always made Joseph recall the time when Melissa was young. It even helped him slightly understand why such a powerful existence like Boss Lin chose to be an ordinary and unremarkable bookstore owner.

“You...” Joseph stared in disbelief at this tall, lanky person.

Zadkiel was somewhat surprised. ‘Haniel’s’ intelligence had clearly stated that Joseph and Wilde had practically perished together, but now, the former was actually alive and well.

“Looks like that bookstore owner let you live,” Zadkiel said, revealing sharp teeth lining his mouth as he spoke.

“Who the hell are you?” Joseph asked as he started to tremble violently, unable to accept the death of Little Mary.

“Path of the Flaming Sword, ‘Balance Keeper’ Zadkiel.” Zadkiel politely tipped his hat toward Joseph as he introduced himself.

“You killed Little Mary?!” Joseph asked incredulously.

Little Mary? Zadkiel thought for a moment, then glanced down at the lump of minced flesh. He didn't wish to answer Joseph's stupid question.

"Let's make a deal. How would you like to join the Path of the Flaming Sword?" Zadkiel revealed a smile. "We are about to go to war with the bookstore owner, and I've come today to deliver the declaration.

"I'll give you one chance. It's still not too late for you to switch sides now, although... you must have a lot in your battle with Wilde, right?"

"Boss Lin? The Path of the Flaming Sword wishes to go up against Boss Lin?" Boss Lin was even more important to Joseph, and he even put aside Little Mary and scoffed in disbelief. "How could you all grossly overestimate yourselves that hard?"

Zadkiel's face darkened. "Looks like you've chosen death."

Having said that, Zadkiel judged his own position, then said, "I'll kill you here, and the bookstore owner should be able to sense it. It's a hassle to go all the way over there, so I'll just use your corpse as the declaration of war."

When Zadkiel finished speaking, Joseph heard what sounded like the ticking of a balance scale behind him that seemed to get closer and closer. It was at that moment, Joseph recalled—

Balance Keeper... Tsk, could he be that transcendent being self-proclaiming himself to be the 'Angel of Law' that once destroyed all order more than 600 years ago? Joseph had read about that chaotic event in the confidential archives of Secret Rite Tower.

"Finally guessing it now is too late." Zadkiel chuckled. "I already gave you a chance."

"Little Mary, were you the one that killed her?" The exchange had already been locked in, but Joseph was unchanging, seemingly unaffected as he continued to question, which to Zadkiel was like asking if he had stomped on an ant outside his house.

“So what if I did? That was her price,” Zadkiel said indifferently.

The alley looked as if it had been ravaged by a massive fire. Dilapidated old houses around it, which were uninhabited, were nearly burnt to ashes by Joseph’s flames. Gently wiping blood from the corner of his eyes, Joseph looked at the ashes of Little Mary on the ground and sighed.

In revenge, he kicked the balance scale on the ground fiercely.

What the hell, that’s all you had?

Zadkiel hadn’t even gotten to finish his pompous words. After admitting that he had killed Little Mary, the former had been instantaneously turned to ashes by Joseph’s flames which destroyed everything.

Zadkiel had been gravely mistaken.

After the great battle between Joseph and Wilde, not only was Joseph largely fine, he had also been enveloped by the vast, powerful aether in the bookstore’s basement and even absorbed power from the skull of Calamity Dragon, which Boss Lin had casually chucked there.

The current Joseph was even more powerful than the one that had been in the battle that shook 67th Avenue.

...All things could be burned.

And while Zadkiel was quite difficult to deal with, Joseph used up all his aether to beat Zadkiel back into his original form.

After seeing Zadkiel return to his original form, he still wasn’t satisfied and kicked the ancient balance scale on the ground with force.

He had a complicated look on his face as he gazed at Little Mary, whom he had originally intended to take good care of but was now reduced to ashes.

Joseph couldn't help but feel a sense of helplessness as he quietly scooped Little Mary's remains into a jar and buried them in the only small garden on 23rd Avenue that was less than three square meters wide. Little Mary's sickly mother would start calling for her soon enough till her voice went hoarse. However, Joseph no longer wished to care.

Human life is really too short... Joseph sighed.

He returned to the bookstore with the scale. As usual, Boss Lin was seated at the counter, flipping through a book.

"You are back early today, Joseph," Lin Jie said without looking up.

Noticing Joseph didn't answer, Lin Jie looked up and eyed Joseph before asking, "Didn't you previously complain that kids were annoying? At least it won't be a problem for the time being."

Joseph kept his head down and didn't answer still, as if he were a child that had done something wrong. Lin Jie returned back to his books and didn't continue to speak.

Beginning from a certain day, Joseph felt that he was finding it harder to understand Boss Lin.

He sighed softly, then placed the balance scale on Boss Lin's counter which actually seemed a rather fitting spot.

"I'm going to take a rest, Boss Lin," Joseph finally blurted out after some hesitation.

Lin Jie didn't lift his head and simply responded with a "Mmm."

Joseph paused just as he was about to head down to the basement, with the intention of telling Boss Lin about the Path of the Flaming Sword's declaration of war. However, seeing Boss Lin eyeing the swaying balance scale with a complicated look on his face made Joseph think otherwise.

"Path of the Flaming Sword," Lin Jie murmured softly, then lifted his hand and gently flicked the scale.

This balance scale of law that Joseph couldn't even move was like a toy in Boss Lin's hand, tipping overwhelmingly to one side.

Joseph gulped and saw Boss Lin's gentle face, but surprisingly felt a familiar sense of fear. Even though they had been together for so many days, his awe toward Boss Lin that had diminished slightly surged up once again.

Lin Jie noticed Joseph watching him and turned toward the latter and chuckled. "Weren't you going to rest?"

"Mm, yes, Boss Lin," Joseph replied nervously and returned to his room.

In the basement, Joseph felt really uneasy, but at least he understood one thing—Boss Lin was somehow pissed, or had already lost his patience with the Path of the Flaming Sword. In other words, he had grown tired of watching their performance.

Chapter 431: Definitely Not Human!

Chapter 431: Definitely Not Human!

“Zadkiel is dead, but not entirely dead,” said Metatron.

Like a huge mass of cotton floating in the air, seemingly a huge, light, pitch-black mass, never revealing his true form, Metatron was the Path of the Flaming Sword’s observer.

“What?!” Michael’s azure blue eyes widened as he stared at Metatron in disbelief.

All of them knew that the true form of Zadkiel was the law that controlled the price and return of everything; an immortal existence. Metatron said that he was dead but not entirely dead, meaning that he must have been reduced to his original form.

“Argh!” Michael sighed with regret as he stomped on the golden beach. “I said it long ago to not confront the bookstore owner head-on!”

Michael stared straight at ‘Haniel,’ who appeared as a young man with a slightly different personality, as he said that.

‘Haniel’ ignored Michael’s questioning, pretending not to understand Michael’s accusation and acting as if he didn’t instigate the Path of the Flaming Sword and Boss Lin to go against each other.

“Metatron, how did Zadkiel die? Did you see it clearly? How strong was the bookstore owner?” Michael asked, frowning.

Yet another compatriot had been lost.

As the leader of the ten angels with extraordinary ability, Michael knew that now wasn’t the time to blame his comrades.

In his floating non-humanoid form, Metatron said softly, “Zadkiel didn’t even meet with the bookstore owner. Instead, he was killed by the bookstore owner’s subordinate, Joseph.”

Michael’s breathing nearly ceased when he heard this conclusion.

He could no longer hold it in anymore and turned to ‘Haniel.’
“Didn’t you say you witnessed Joseph die with your own eyes?”

‘Haniel’ raised an eyebrow, but didn’t reply.

“Rather than this, shouldn’t we be discussing how the bookstore owner doesn’t seem to even care about us?” Raphael, who had been silent all this time, suddenly spoke up.

Of the Path of the Flaming Sword’s ten angels, eight were left. Amongst them, Raphael, Metatron, and Kamael hadn’t ever met the bookstore owner.

“The purpose of sending Zadkiel was to deliver our declaration of war and, in a certain point of view, he was just an envoy of the Path of the Flaming Sword. He didn’t care about us at all, which is why he killed Zadkiel.

“I cannot tolerate this insult,” Raphael said calmly.

“Don’t be hasty,” muttered Michael.

“This is not rashness but a necessary decision. Have you forgotten?” Raphael calmly gazed at the void space sculpted by Zaphkiel and continued, “Heaven, Eden, God, Angels, the Kabbalah Tree... the realm above the material world... the path to becoming a god through the dream realm!”

Michael’s blood ran cold as he clenched his fists once again. The reason he persisted on this path to the dream realm, and how he believed it was the only right way, was all because of a book he found in the Lower District.

That book depicted a world unheard of, a world of truth where there was only one God—the Almighty.

Michael had unwavering faith in everything that was depicted in that book. Even the aliases of the Path of the Flaming Sword's ten members were derived from that book.

"You tell us not to act impulsively, but in truth, it was your caution that killed Zadkiel," said Kamael all of a sudden.

"Alright." Michael seemed to suddenly recall that book of truths. All his dreams and efforts seemingly came back to him once more, and he found the strength to clench his fist even tighter. "Let's find an opportune moment, and we'll head to the bookstore together."

"No need to wait," Haniel interjected. "Let's go now."

Duan Xuemin... Mom's name is Duan Xuemin...

Franca repeated the name over and over in her mind. She immediately wanted to tell her father and grandfather about her mother's recovery.

But according to her now sober mother, it seemed as if she didn't belong here and came from another world.

Franca wiped away her mother's tears. In the process of coming to this world, she paid a very painful price, so much that she went insane over a decade...

Years of sadness and loneliness ate away at her mother as she constantly relived the experience of being trapped in that underground palace all those years. In her head, she was still the fresh academic that had just entered and was writing the first line of her journal.

But what she didn't know was that hundreds of years had passed, and she could never ever return to her home.

After a long time, Duan Xuemin finally accepted the current situation reluctantly. She had already been Professor Lin Minghai's best student and had an incredibly strong will.

She knew that everyone survived by eating each other, as well as the fact it never rained in that underground world; that so-called rainwater was actually the blood from the many corpses.

And more importantly, she was aware of that unknown horror growing inside the belly of her teacher's wife...

That's why she left Professor Lin Minghai and his wife before becoming food for the evil god.

She secretly kept all the moldy dry food, refused to drink the so-called rainwater, and never ate the corpses of her own kind. She wanted to maintain her sanity and survive, but when she finally escaped from the underground palace using all her all, what she saw was another world.

Duan Xuemin couldn't bear it any longer and went utterly insane.

—Till today.

"Are you my child...?" Having regained her sanity and realizing the current situation, Duan Xuemin unexpectedly reached out to touch the golden-haired, blue-eyed, yet somewhat similar-looking face of Franca.

"I am, Mom." Franca pursed her lips, tears swirling in her eyes. Duan Xuemin turned to look at the cupboard door beside her, and reflected on the glass panel was the face of a woman who had aged and lost her youth.

All of her memories came flooding back, and Duan Xuemin gradually understood the current circumstances. It seemed that her time in the underground world, which lasted for several months, had yet to end, and danger, death, madness, and slaughter still floated around here.

"Don't tell anyone about me regaining my sanity," Duan Xuemin, who hadn't yet adapted to the current circumstances but had already started thinking of countermeasures, said, "What's your name?"

Franca pouted, feeling slightly aggrieved. "My name is Franca

Curtis, Mom.”

“Curtis...” Duan Xuemin repeated the name.

Although she seemed to know nothing about the outside world all these years, some memories within her still remained vivid, and thus, she asked Franca about the name of this world as well as everything about the Curtis Family.

Duan Xuemin’s mind revolved rapidly as her memories during this crazy period of time became more defined.

Just like the 21st century expedition team she was from, the Curtis Family on the Azir continent was also studying that underground palace in the Lower District. And she herself had come to Azir through the ‘door’ that connected the two worlds.

The Curtis Family, however, didn’t enter that ‘door.’ Perhaps they were researching something different and already knew what was beyond the ‘door.’ As for Duan Xuemin who came out of the ‘door’ alive, she was the best experimental subject for them, regardless of the state she was in.

“Franca,” Duan Xuemin gazed at her child and asked, “How did you know how to make this dish?”

White cut chicken was the specialty dish of Duan Xuemin’s father, which he had also taught to her. In their single-parent family without a mother, Duan Xuemin honed this dish to perfection, and it was also her younger brother’s favorite.

“I bought a recipe book from an auction, it was sold by a bookstore owner called Boss Lin.”

“Let me see it.”

Franca nodded and quickly brought the recipe book from her room. Familiar Chinese characters enter Duan Xuemin’s eyes as she flipped through the pages quickly, revealing her first smile in over ten years.

“Mom, can you understand it?” Duan Xuemin didn’t answer that

question but instead looked at Franca and uttered, “Lin, Boss Lin?

“Where is he?!”

“I’m not sure, but I can ask around. He seems to be quite famous,” answered Franca, who was still a little confused.

A glimmer of hope ignited in Duan Xuemin’s heart. The fact that the man could sell such a book meant that he might be someone she knew. The only person with the surname Lin on the expedition team was Professor Lin Minghai.

No... there was one other.

Suddenly, Duan Xuemin remembered the kind smile of her mentor, Zhang Caiyong, as she gently caressed her protruding belly.

A chill ran down Duan Xuemin’s spine.

The child conceived in the underground palace was definitely not human!

But she couldn’t give up on the other possibility. She needed to know who the bookstore owner was. Duan Xuemin turned to Franca and said, “Give me paper and pen. I’ll write a letter, and you can take it to that Boss Lin for me.”

Chapter 432: Will You Devour Me

Chapter 432: Will You Devour Me

Franca was wearing a silk cloak, the simplest and most inexpensive one she could find in her closet.

The Central District was currently in chaos, and even Franca's father and grandfather had been summoned to the central administration for a meeting. However, this also gave Franca a great opportunity.

Due to her intrinsic 'weakness' of being an ordinary person, she had never set foot outside the Central District her whole life.

Having tied her blonde hair into a high ponytail and putting on a red silken cloak, Franca took her mother's letter and the recipe book next to the mirror and jumped out of the window.

After days of investigating and persuading her servant, Mike, for help, Franca finally left the Curtis household alone for the first time, under the guise of her mother's superb acting at pretending to be crazy.

Over the past two days hearing her mother's confessions, Franca gradually understood more about her mother and learned of her origins.

Her mother was an archaeologist from another world who remained steadfast in spirit and mind in the face of an evil god and maintained her humanity.

Years of confusion caused her to retreat into a protective shell, but her spirit returned to her body once more when she tasted the cuisine of home.

The reason why her father married her mother was also for

experimentation, and for the birth of Franca herself... *But what sort of power did I inherit?* Franca agilely climbed over the little hill in her garden and, gasping for breath, got into a vehicle that Mike had arranged.

This, however, wasn't a private car but a van packed with a bunch of poor workers.

The smell of the machine oil and body odor of the poor, who only bathed once every few months, made Franca, who had always been isolated from such things, nearly vomit. However, she still held it in till she got off the car and leaned against an electric pole before throwing up.

Still, when Franca arrived at 23rd avenue, her clothes looked out of place in this poor community.

It was clear that poor people were everywhere here. Her father and those dignitaries from the Central District had all been lying! The so-called world of happiness and beauty for everyone on the Azir continent, the world protected by so-called saints and witches... were all just hungry mouths.

Finally, Franca arrived at Lin Jie's bookstore with the letter and recipe book in hand.

The somewhat old, dilapidated bookstore was the most magnificent store on the entire block. Franca breathed a sigh of relief, wiped the sweat from her forehead, and stepped inside.

Jingle—

Joseph had hung a new tiny cat-shaped bell on the bookstore's door, saying that it had been given to him by children from the slums. Whenever customers entered, it would make a pleasant jingle.

But in truth, the bookstore had few customers, yet the bell chimed incessantly every day and was both noisy and a tad annoying.

Lin Jie really wanted to ask Joseph to throw the bell away, but he couldn't bear to criticize that beautiful heart beneath that manly

physique.

“Hello,” Franca said politely. “I’m looking for Boss Lin.”

It was only then that Lin Jie realized it wasn’t the wind but an actual customer— *I finally have another customer!*

Before him stood a disheveled girl, sweating profusely, but dressed rather luxuriously. Her delicate leather boots were covered in mud, and it was clear they weren’t meant for walking.

She’s obviously a runaway rich girl... Lin Jie couldn’t help but give a silent laugh as he thought back to Ji Zhixiu and Cherry, feeling that he had opened up a rather extraordinary channel of customers right from the beginning.

Putting on his usual professional smile, he crossed his arms and stroked his chin. “That’s me. I’m Lin Jie. What can I do for you, young friend?”

Franca’s face immediately lit up with a smile as her entire body relaxed in relief.

On hearing that there was a customer, Joseph came out from the basement and saw Franca, whom he had seen before at a past banquet. However, they both had completely forgotten about it.

“Boss Lin, I bought your book at Miss Ji Zhixiu’s auction.” Franca then took out the book, ***One Thousand Classic Home-dishes***.

Joseph froze. *This girl... actually obtained this book?!*

He clearly saw the title— ***Blood Sacrifice***.

“It’s this book, classic home-dishes. There are many methods inside that I don’t quite understand,” said Franca as she wiped away the sweat on her face.

Joseph: ???

“Ah, this book... It’s pretty normal that you can’t understand it. Norzin’s dietary conditions are backward indeed... As for what’s in

the book, it's something I can spend the whole day discussing with you."

"Thank you, Boss Lin." Franca's eyes lit up as she revealed a lovely smile.

"Oh, and here's my mother's letter." Franca quickly handed the letter to Lin Jie.

As Lin Jie glanced at the letter, his fingers trembled slightly... Even if he had already come to a realization, till that moment truly arrived, his human emotions would still subconsciously want to escape.

He carefully received the letter, and in his field of view, a black shadow crawled onto the surface of the envelope. Aether in the dream space surged, and an immense power abruptly descended, allowing him to see the woman who had written the letter.

A somewhat good-looking mature woman with eyes and brows that seemed familiar. Lin Jie felt that she looked a little like Shendu Archaeological Institute of Cultural Relics' director Duan, whom he had seen at his father's funeral before he transmigrated to this world.

Lin Jie remained silent for a long while before eventually opening the letter—

"Dear fellow compatriot. If you are able to read this text, then perhaps we come from the same place."

"My name is Duan Xuemin. I don't know if you came to this strange world in the same manner as I did, or if you, like me, would always think of returning back."

"I am even more uncertain if I can continue living on, but I feel the need to tell you about the life I have experienced."

Lin Jie carefully read the elegant and familiar name and handwriting on the letter—Duan Xuemin.

The person who was mentioned along with Xu Xiangdong in his

father's journal. The older sister of Shendu Archaeological Institute of Cultural Relic's director Duan, whom Lin Jie knew before he had transmigrated. It turned out that she had never died.

She had survived, and... probably personally witnessed Lin Jie's birth.

"I knew it after our team entered that 'door.' We were possessed by an evil god, a force so evil and incomprehensible that it can only be considered divine. The grand palace was the god's womb, and we were nothing but pawns in its ritual..."

"My teammates devoured each other and went to the god's final lair without purpose. Please forgive them. They were only under the influence of that evil god... I knew their kindhearted nature, and they weren't originally like that."

"The one chosen by the evil god was my teacher's wife, and she bore the evil god's offspring. Then I saw with my own two eyes. Her belly swelled up like a ball, and my teacher, Lin Minghai, dug out a bloody baby from it with his own hands."

"At that point, I was on the verge of crumbling, but I needed to return and tell all of it to everyone."

"I followed Professor Lin in secret, and he led me to the way out. I stepped through the 'door' but found myself in another world. Professor Lin was also nowhere to be found."

"I have every reason to suspect that Professor Lin and the newborn went to Earth, our home. When that child grows up, perhaps it might destroy Earth and we need to do something."

"After passing through the 'door,' time and space will be distorted, and that affects both worlds."

"Perhaps that child has already grown up, and Earth has been destroyed. Or maybe he will accept the guidance of fate and return to this continent known as Azir."

"Or perhaps... that child is you?"

“If it is you, will you devour me?”

Chapter 433: Close Your Eyes

Chapter 433: Close Your Eyes

The letter ended abruptly, the final stroke of the last word trailing off, making it obvious that the writer had been nervous and fearful.

But for Lin Jie, there was no need to continue analyzing the contents or handwriting of the letter. As long as he wanted to, he could cast his omnipresent gaze at Duan Xuemin, which could traverse all time and space.

That woman was worthy of being someone that had escaped the evil god's corruption. When writing the letter, she had subconsciously looked up into the air, feeling the familiar sensation of a gaze that frightened her.

Perhaps it was this sensation that confirmed her suspicion that the letter's recipient was that divine being.

Lin Jie withdrew his gaze and didn't even raise his head. He returned the letter back to the envelope and placed it on the table. As he did so, he looked at the thick book, ***One Thousand Classic Home-dishes*** .

Lin Jie glanced at Joseph, then at Franca, gently stroking the cookbook in his hand. He had a complicated look on his face for a moment, then suddenly chuckled softly. "So that's how it is... Haha, so that's how it is."

Franca and Joseph both looked at Lin Jie in surprise.

This was the first time Joseph had seen Boss Lin in such a state. Boss Lin had always been calm and composed, so how could he suddenly act this way? Thus, Joseph couldn't help but shift his gaze to Franca.

Franca asked apprehensively, "Is anything wrong, Boss Lin?"

Lin Jie raised his hand and rubbed the top of Franca's head, saying softly, "It's nothing, good child. I ought to give you a reward. Walking all the way from the Central District must be tiring, huh?"

Franca immediately broke into a cute smile, revealing a row of neat, white teeth. Such behavior was usually frowned upon in noble etiquette.

"Thank you, but it's fine. This was something that I did for my mom!"

Lin Jie's touch made Franca feel a warm energy entering her body as if she were bathed in holy light, which made her squint.

Lin Jie could see the pride in Franca's smile and scanned the table as if looking for something. Then, he noticed the balance scale on the table and promptly handed it to Franca. "This little token... is for you."

You call this a little token?! thought Joseph to himself. This is the balance scale that controls the Law of equivalent exchange in the world...

He was going crazy inside, but he had long understood Boss Lin's strength. For this great being, this balance scale was indeed something trivial.

"Boss Lin," Joseph whispered, and even gulped a little nervously.

Lin Jie glanced up at Joseph and gave him the usual smile.

"You seem to be troubled. Do you have any orders?" muttered Joseph.

Lin Jie shook his head. "I'm not all troubled. On the contrary, I see things much clearer now... I think I roughly know where I have to go. But before I go, there are some things I need to take care of."

"What?" Joseph couldn't help blurting out.

Rumble— Crash!

The moment Joseph exclaimed, and before Franca's eyes could even widen in surprise, the entire bookstore came crashing down like a soda can that had been abruptly stomped on. The bookshelf behind Lin Jie, which had been dark and indistinct like the mouth of a menacing beast, shattered like a mirror in an instant.

The books within it were sucked into a shadow-like vortex behind Lin Jie. At the moment the bookstore was flattened, the layer of darkness all around the bookstore was also sucked in and rushed frantically into the shadows behind Lin Jie.

The bookstore wasn't destroyed by anyone; rather, it was because Lin Jie had retrieved the power that originally resided there.

Joseph wasn't afraid of falling steel and concrete but instead stared fixedly at Boss Lin. Boss Lin appeared completely unperturbed as stuff fell all around him and the darkness all around was sucked into his shadow.

"Is it... over?" Zaphkiel, who was struggling to float in the void, whispered.

Zaphkiel, the 'Void Intermediary,' the world's strongest black magician that incorporated the void as his own domain, had pulled the entire bookstore into his constructed void, causing the physical form of the bookstore to collapse completely.

This was the first step of the Path of the Flaming Sword's attack on Lin Jie.

"Don't underestimate him," Michael muttered. Standing beside him were the other Path of the Flaming Sword's 'angels.'

"I'll go take a look." The headless yet dressed in knight garb, 'Thousand-Souled Undead,' Kamael, transformed into a black shadow and infiltrated the ruins.

Michael frowned as he watched the former go. Kamael controlled the souls of the world and was a true hell knight, using his own body to control the underworld and tens of thousands of dead souls.

Kamael was undoubtedly one of the Path of the Flaming Sword's strongest members. As long as there were souls of humans in the world, Kamael would be immortal.

'Thousand-Souled Undead,' Kamael, possessed thousands of souls and existed in every corner of Norzin.

Kamael and Raphael could be considered the Path of the Flaming Sword's trump cards.

Raphael could be considered a friend of Michael's since a long time ago. Kamael was quiet and reserved and practically followed the other two obediently. The three of them formed the initial Path of the Flaming Sword, and they considered Michael their friend.

"Keep observing, Metatron," Michael raised his hand and reminded 'Thought Observer,' Metatron, who was away from the rest and observing from outside the void domain.

"Uh..." Metatron's slightly perplexed voice echoed all around. "The bookstore owner's will within the bookstore has disappeared."

"Is he dead?" Raphael cocked his head. He had a figure similar to Michael's but had what seemed like an undulating surface of the water for a face. Unlike Michael, he didn't like humans and wouldn't appear in a human form.

"Of course not," said 'Haniel,' who was right at the back. "Boss Lin is clearly an immortal... How could a god be bound by death?"

Everyone's gazes fell on Haniel. His words didn't sound like a compatriot of the Path of the Flaming Sword but rather seemed like someone gloating about his boss being very powerful

At that moment, Michael also realized what he had been suspicious about 'Haniel.'

"You, what exactly..."

"Hmm?" A puzzled sound from Metatron interrupted Michael's questioning. "It's appeared again. Boss Lin's thoughts."

All of the ‘angels’ were stunned upon hearing this.

“He only disappeared for a few seconds,” Metatron said, the fear in his voice evident to his compatriots. “Kamael’s clone... disappeared in an instant... Kamael’s dead.”

Michael: “...?”

Fitch, posing as Haniel, scoffed and chuckled softly, seemingly having given up his disguise completely. However, the several Supreme-ranks around him were already too busy to care.

Raphael’s lake-like face was rippling, indicating the turmoil within him.

“Kamael...” Raphael whispered.

The door of the flattened bookstore was abruptly kicked open. Joseph stood there with a bewildered expression. He then looked behind him, then moved aside differentially, revealing a figure that still appeared the same as always.

Dark hair, black eyes, slightly pale skin. A scholarly face and a gentle smile, dressed in all-black garb, with dark and deep pupils that were like an unfathomable abyss.

Lin Jie, or perhaps, not Lin Jie.

His shadow extended behind him, covering the ruins of the entire bookstore and forming a dark void, like a curtain where the stars and universe were warped and twisted.

In Lin Jie’s hand was a fresh book without a title on its cover. The blank pages flitted rapidly, with each page being a screaming soul—Kamael!

Michael’s pupils narrowed. Kamael... had actually been turned into a book!

Thump!

Lin Jie mercilessly shut the thick book, and a flustered-looking

Franca peeked out from behind him, holding the balance scale like a little toy.

Lin Jie's dark eyes scanned all the Path of the Flaming Sword's members, finally stopping on Michael.

"You knocked a little too strongly, my guests," uttered Lin Jie.

Michael unexpectedly felt a sense of trepidation the moment their eyes met. It was the same feeling as being scared out of his wits during his first battle with Lin Jie.

"Unforgivable... unforgivable!" Raphael's face bubbled like boiling water as he roared. The need to avenge Kamael had already firmly taken hold of him. He opened his arms, and the entire void was engulfed by the towering waves.

Lin Jie smiled slightly, kept the book in his hand away, and said gently to Franca who was behind him, "Close your eyes."

Chapter 434: Are You God?

Chapter 434: Are You God?

“Close your eyes.”

Lin Jie’s gentle voice echoed above Franca’s head, and she promptly shut her eyes.

What sounded like the crashing of huge ocean waves reverberated all around. She, who had never heard the sound of waves, felt as if she had been placed in the midst of a swirling and turbulent ocean.

Joseph’s eyes were wide open as he saw a summoned ocean with roiling waves that seemed capable of engulfing the entire Norzin.

“Ocean...” muttered the former Great Radiant Knight weakly.

Lin Jie remained unfazed as he looked at the sky-high waves indifferently. His dark eyes were like black holes that wouldn’t even let light escape.

“Be careful, Boss Lin!” Joseph instinctively tried to get in front of Lin Jie when he saw the latter un-moving. It wasn’t that he was worried Lin Jie would be powerless, but he simply wanted to protect and be utterly loyal to Lin Jie.

Lin Jie raised a hand to stop Joseph, then, without looking back, pointed behind him. Joseph nodded at once and quickly took a few steps forward to stand in front of Franca.

With the freshly crafted book in one hand, Lin Jie casually strolled toward the Path of the Flaming Sword’s members.

Raphael had transformed into towering waves with an overwhelming aura, hundreds of meters high. The immense pressure from this towering wall of water made Joseph’s eyes turn red, so much that burning flames could be seen within his pupils.

The giant waves completely blocked the other members of the Path

of the Flaming Sword, and because the entire battle was transitioning within Zaphkiel's void domain, it had no effect on the outside world. As the master of all things within his domain, Zaphkiel snapped his fingers.

Snap~

Amid the roar of giant waves, the snap of fingers still produced a crisp sound, echoing throughout the void domain, and Lin Jie heard it clearly.

He stopped in his tracks and turned his attention to Zaphkiel.

Lin Jie's dark gaze locked onto Zaphkiel for a moment, causing him to tremble all over. Then the Void Intermediary saw Lin Jie smile at him.

Zaphkiel was capable of reshaping everything within his void world, and with the snap of his fingers, Raphael immediately felt an inexhaustible power coursing throughout his entire body.

"He's about to launch an attack!" "Thought Observer" Metatron exclaimed fearfully.

Metatron didn't have great presence within the Path of the Flaming Sword, but he played a significant role. He hid outside the fringes of the world, and instead of his self-proclaimed title, 'Thought Observer,' it was more apt to call him a 'Listener.'

As long as one existed within the world, Metatron was able to see and hear everything done by that individual.

Lin Jie observed the members of the Path of the Flaming Sword and couldn't help but start thinking... 'Thousand-Souled Undead' Kamael was a melee assassin, "Towering Tide" Raphael was a large-scale AOE mage, Zaphkiel was like a domain support, and Metatron was a scout.

"From a certain point of view, you guys are rather coordinated." Lin Jie cocked his head and chuckled.

"Stop you jabbering, you evil god." Zaphkiel couldn't conceal his

fear because Lin Jie was within his own Void Kingdom. In theory, that would mean that he could easily be manipulated, but Lin Jie's power was too great, and Zaphkiel was even more aware of this fact than Metatron.

He intended to trump his fear with a roar, "The Void is my world, and I am the master of all things here!"

The smiling Lin Jie shook his head, then sighed before he, too, raised a hand and snapped his fingers like Zaphkiel had done.

Snap~

The clear crisp snap seemed to make everything pause for a second, but only just a second. And before anyone could even be surprised, the waves had completely engulfed Lin Jie. The merciless sea rarely appeared before humans, and Raphael was, without a doubt, the master of the sea.

The waves twisted and pounced like wild beasts, and ancient transcendent marine creatures that had long disappeared from the entire Azir continent emerged from the depths, tearing and chasing their prey.

Fitch, who was standing with the Path of the Flaming Sword, was included within Zaphkiel's void domain. While being undetected, he could see the entire battlefield at the same time.

Raphael... a remnant of the ancient sea elf world indeed... thought Fitch with a frown.

With victory in the grasp, Raphael emerged from the ocean, a gradually outlining figure of a burly man with curly hair and a curly beard. As he came up from the foaming white sea water, his lower half revealed what appeared like a shark's tail.

Raphael did not show any joy as he watched the many long-extinct transcendent sea creatures drag Lin Jie's already crushed body into the deep sea, tearing it apart in the dark depths, before he finally breathed a sigh of relief.

Having experienced Kamael's death, Raphael didn't relax and he

muttered, “Metatron, inform me of the bookstore owner’s position, quick.”

His voice was hoarse yet resounding, like a tsunami raging in the ocean.

However, there was no answer.

“Metatron!!” Raphael raised an eyebrow, sensing something amiss as he began looking for his comrade.

Although no one answered, Lin Jie’s torn body slowly floated to the surface, piece by piece... And also, the book containing Kamael’s souls floated up alongside his remains.

“At least he’s dead...” Raphael finally felt a sense of relief. In the next moment, he appeared next to Lin Jie’s remains, not to check on his body but to pick up the book. He held it to his chest and whispered, “Kamael, my friend. I’ll resurrect you when I step on the path to godhood.”

Having said that, he finally smiled with a sense of victory. “At least, I’ve avenged you.”

Raphael sighed as he looked at his friend’s remains and what was left of Lin Jie’s body. It had been devoured so badly by fishes that only bits remained. Half the head was missing, the face eaten clean, intestines floated like seaweed as red blood gradually diluted into the deep blue ocean.

But, that wasn’t Lin Jie’s corpse. It was his.

That familiar appearance, that pale fish tail. It was all too familiar...

“It’s me...?!” The book that contained his friend fell into the ocean with a splash as Raphael’s eyes widened in disbelief.

“A real pity, sigh...” Lin Jie smiled.

The ocean cleared away as if it had never existed, leaving only some remnant pieces on the ground—what remained of Raphael.

“When...?” Michael stared at Raphael’s body, as if a heavy lead ball were lodged in his throat. He struggled just to utter a mere few words, “When did Raphael...?”

“The dream... realm.” Metatron’s panicked voice from beyond the fringes of the world resounded in the ears of his comrades. “The dream realm... It’s coming!”

Obvious terror laced Metatron’s warning. Evidently, he had gone completely insane the moment he witnessed the coming of Lin Jie’s dream realm.

“He’s not just dragging Raphael into the dream realm, but it’s the arrival of the entire dream realm disrupting all Laws and causing Raphael to be unable to distinguish between reality and dream.

“Did he kill himself?” Fitch stood proudly behind the other Path of the Flaming Sword’s members, his voice quavering in admiration.

Michael couldn’t believe it. The dream realm was what he had always been striving for, but it had been a world locked away by the Primordial Witches.

That was the path to becoming a god, which he had spent his whole life trying to pursue.

Could it be that the bookstore owner was the master of the dream realm... and the one true god written in the Bible that was found by Michael, which he based his entire goal on?

Was he god?

Chapter 435: Obliterate! Instant Death!

Chapter 435: Obliterate! Instant Death!

Before Michael took on the name Michael, he still roamed the human realm.

Very long ago, Michael was actually only a cluster of elemental light that gained consciousness and power over time.

Everything is revealed wherever light shines upon. When he mastered the Law of light, Michael gained 'Eyes of Insight' at the same time, and all within the ordinary world couldn't escape his sight.

A thousand years ago, humankind, protected by the Witch of Life, had already entered a new era. The witch's power completely dissipated, but she also left behind some worries. The evil god that arrived in the Second Era, quietly biding its time to resurface on the Azir continent.

If 'He' resurfaced, humankind would perish.

This prophecy urged humans to eliminate that evil god, but humans' selfish nature... no, it should be their animalistic nature, their lack of care for whether the weak lived or died, that but instead desire the power of that evil god.

All the organizations that were established were basically centered around that evil god.

For example, Secret Rite Tower was founded to capture the power of the evil god.

A thousand years ago, no one ever coveted that treasure, or rather, time bomb sleeping in the Lower District. And Michael was one of them.

But Michael had obtained a book called *The Bible* .

This book outlined a paradise that had never been imagined before. It was a new path, a way to the dream realm. In that book, the master of that world known as ‘God’ sat with a total of thirteen angels, and these were the origins of the Path of the Flaming Sword’s name.

The immense power that Lin Jie displayed now made Michael gradually lump him together with that ‘God.’

Michael’s thoughts seemed to go back more than a thousand years ago, until his comrades pushed him.

“Michael, what do we do now?” Metatron’s helplessness sounded in his ears.

It was only then did Michael return from his memories and looked toward the bookstore owner to see him strolling over unhurriedly.

Gabriel, Sandalphon, Raziel, to Zadkiel, Kamael, and Raphael... Six of his companions were already gone. No, there was still the fellow behind him—‘Haniel.’ Michael turned around and found that Fitch was still behind, smiling at him.

He should have guessed it. This was an impostor. The real Haniel died long ago.

Ignoring Fitch, Michael touched his right eye, and then gently closed his left eye. At that moment, a green light began to emit from his right eye—

‘Eyes of Insight’ was what Michael used to observe all things, past and future, disasters and fate... Even beyond the world, nothing could escape him. He considered it a Supreme-rank weapon.

And it was precisely this pair of eyes that had brought him countless compatriots.

After closing his left eye, Michael used “Eyes of Insight” to lock onto Lin Jie and bellowed, “All things must come to an end! Lin Jie, let me see how you die!”

Lin Jie glanced at Michael indifferently. The latter in the distance was covering an eye and shouting out a war-cry, which honestly reminded Lin Jie of a chuunibyou heroine from an anime he had watched before.

Moreover, Michael, with his golden hair and blue eyes, looked like a cut-out human, making him seem overly artificial.

Naturally, Michael wouldn't have known how Lin Jie was ridiculing him, but when he looked at Lin Jie, Michael froze for a moment. Then, the corners of his lips slowly curled upward.

"...I've seen it." He was now grinning as disbelief could be heard in his voice. He never imagined that he would really see it.

"You're not the one true god. You're just a puppet of an evil god. This body is a mere container for that evil god. You are human through and through. I've seen the way you die clearly!"

Lin Jie tilted his head, watching Michael in slight bewilderment, who seemed like some lunatic raving.

Michael waved his arm forward and commanded Zaphkiel, "Transform this void realm into a place of utter destruction."

Zaphkiel didn't respond. He was panting heavily and clearly frightened by Lin Jie. He immediately opened his arms, and as the master of the void, he made the void devour everything.

As soon as Zaphkiel commanded it, a highly corrosive and poisonous air filled the void.

Joseph, standing amid the ruins of the bookstore with Franca, immediately burst into flames and expanded the blazes to burn away the poison while protecting Franca at the same time.

Lin Jie eyed the putrid mist floating everywhere and sucked in a cold breath. "Tsk." He instinctively raised a hand but was surprised to find that it was already starting to decay.

The mist wasn't any powerful transcendent ability and was something an individual like Joseph could easily avoid. However,

ordinary folks were powerless against it.

“I wasn’t wrong. Your body is indeed human and ordinary!” Michael said as he stared at Lin Jie with his right eye.

Lin Jie saw Michael’s crazed look and sighed resignedly. Then, with a thought, his decaying hand started to regenerate. Other decayed areas had also started to grow back. Lin Jie looked down at his own body, then suddenly heard Michael cry out—

“Obliterate! Instant death!”

Michael suddenly opened his previously shut left eye, and a red light shone from it as Lin Jie’s body continued to regenerate.

“Where there is light, there shall be no shadow! Anything I see cannot escape the fate of death,” raved Michael. “Now, this human body will turn to ashes.”

Lin Jie raised an eyebrow in surprise as his body cracked like glass.

“It succeeded!” Michael nearly jumped out from elation. “Recently awakened evil god, no. Just an ordinary you who obtained this evil god power, indeed your body is ordinary flesh and blood. As the vessel, your mission is over,” he said with a smile. In the next moment, Lin Jie’s body shattered into pieces, leaving only the shadow behind.

“That shadow is the true evil god!” Michael said, then turned to Joseph, or more precisely, the person behind Joseph—Franca.

That girl should be an ordinary human, but the Law emanating from her body was special. Perhaps she might become the evil god’s next targeted vessel, so she needed to be eliminated immediately.

The surviving ‘angels’ also regained some hope.

“It’s too early to rejoice. That woman has to be killed first.” Michael imbued power into his left eye and stared at Franca, who had listened docilely and had her eyes tightly shut.

“There are times I really wish I was just a vessel.” A familiar voice spoke, making Michael stiffen.

The floating black mist re-entered Lin Jie's body, which had turned into ashes. The smile on Michael's face disappeared.

"How can this be, this body has already..." Zaphkiel, who stood at the side, had a look of incredulity, no longer having the air the master of the void should have.

"Ancient Dragon blood!" Michael's pupils shrank as he watched the burning veins amongst the ashes of Lin Jie's body.

The Ancient Dragon blood-line left in the ashes started to reshape its own body, gradually turning into an old, withered, gigantic dragon that was like an ancient tree.

"In a certain sense, I'm neither a god nor a deity, because I can't fulfill wishes or listen to prayers," Lin Jie's voice sounded faintly from the body of the old dragon. "But you can consider me a god; after all, that is what you think, and I have no right to interfere."

"However," Lin Jie gazed down at the ashes on the ground. "I quite liked this ordinary human body that I've been using for the past two decades."

Chapter 436: Showdown!

Chapter 436: Showdown!

Lin Jie transformed into a massive aged dragon, whose scrawny body resembled that of a withered, ancient tree. ‘His’ four claws landed on the ground, causing the entire void realm to quake. ‘He’ roared and the black mist that expelled from ‘His’ mouth had an aura of calamity.

The dragon’s hide was like hardened rock with dry cracks running all over its body. Vessels with steaming magma-like blood could even be seen flowing through these crevasses.

“Calamity Dragon Bakak?!!!” Zaphkiel’s mind was reeling from fright that he fell backward onto the ground. “Boss... Boss Lin’s true form is actually...”

“No,” Michael immediately refuted. He took a hard, long look at ‘Bakak’ and said, “It’s the ancient dragon heart from before. This evil god has absorbed the ancient dragon’s blood and reformed its body.”

Michael originally thought that ‘He’ could only possess a human body, but it turned out that the human body wasn’t a vessel but had always been a part of this evil god.

As for where it came from, and who it really was, Michael had no clue.

Zaphkiel glanced around and gulped. “Michael, you’ve angered Boss Lin! You fool, do you really think you can defeat Him?”

Michael glanced at him in surprise as Zaphkiel continued his rant, “If it wasn’t for your arrogance and hasty analysis, ‘He’ wouldn’t have transformed into a dragon. If this continues, even my Void Kingdom won’t be safe.”

“So what about your void domain?!” Michael grabbed Zaphkiel by

the collar. “You cowardly little man who only cares about his own life.”

Lin Jie never thought that these two would suddenly start arguing... *Hey, there are only three people left in the Path of the Flaming Sword.*

While they were arguing, Lin Jie’s body had already turned into a giant dragon. He lowered his head and looked at himself, feeling that this was somewhat miraculous.

Memories of the past, future, and all living things in the world had returned to his mind, and Lin Jie now thoroughly understood his identity and meaning in this world.

But even so, the twenty years of human experience were invaluable to him. Lin Jie couldn’t help feeling somewhat angry seeing the ashes on the ground. His feelings toward that body were rather complex.

After adapting to his dragon body, Lin Jie looked up and stared at the arguing pair.

As someone who had become a black magician that stood atop the food chain via cultivation, Zaphkiel was still human at heart and had the animalistic nature and cowardice of a human. Thus, in order to survive, he immediately gave up, and his void kingdom collapsed in an instant.

Zaphkiel didn’t maintain his void world out of fear, but in a certain sense, he had still ‘heavily wounded’ Lin Jie.

Just like a shattered mirror, cracks slowly spread all over before everything shattered.

In the real world, Lin Jie’s ancient dragon body appeared under the sunlight, and his massive body instantly caused destruction to the entire 23rd Avenue.

The earth shook, but it only lasted for a moment.

This was Lin Jie’s first time transforming into a dragon, and he had

underestimated the size of his own body. People screamed, and the previously calm street descended into chaos as a mythical creature that existed during the First Era appeared before their very eyes. Just witnessing such a powerful mythical creature was more than enough to drive normal humans close to insanity.

The golden vertical dragon pupils of Lin Jie dilated as he stared at the fleeing masses. He instinctively wanted to withdraw his body, knowing that just the mere presence of this ancient dragon could kill humans.

Humans are too weak, Lin Jie realized at that moment. Although he was no longer considered a human in the traditional sense, maintaining human consciousness and morality was necessary... He turned to Joseph and said, "Protect the people."

Next, he turned his head to the idle Fitch, who had been posing as Haniel all this time. "Don't just stand there."

Having been called out on the spot, Fitch immediately nodded.

Joseph couldn't help looking surprised upon hearing Boss Lin's words, but overwhelming joy came soon after. "Yes, Boss Lin!" *Boss Lin is indeed just, and that has never changed. My choice is the right one; Boss Lin will become a true guardian of humanity.*

Joseph solemnly clenched his fist and ignited himself. A bright light instantly filled the entire battlefield. Due to that brilliant glare, ordinary folk temporarily lost their vision and could no longer see the evil god.

Joseph pushed Franca into the already reconstructed bookstore.

From a certain perspective, this bookstore hadn't been destroyed by the Path of the Flaming Sword. Rather, Boss Lin had foreseen the attack and had excused himself, saying that there was somewhere he needed to go.

When Boss Lin said he roughly knew where he needed to go, Joseph had a realization deep down. Even though he didn't know where exactly that was.... this bookstore might not exist in the future.

Having seen that the poor folk wouldn't have to suffer from harm for the time being, Lin Jie's dragon eyes locked on to those two once more. Or, more precisely, the remaining one.

As a black magician and, at the same time, having human blood in him, Zaphkiel was rather adept at judging the situation at hand. He had really wanted to achieve the dream of becoming a god alongside Michael, but only the living produced output. He had survived for thousands of years, relying on this mantra of self-preservation.

Michael didn't notice that Zaphkiel had already slipped away. But for Lin Jie, regardless of how far Zaphkiel ran, the latter was within reach.

Lin Jie raised a dragon claw, and a blue flame formed a ball in his palm. The image of the fleeing Zaphkiel appeared in the center of the blue flame.

Lin Jie clenched his dragon claw, and the blue ball of fire instantly shattered. Zaphkiel's fleeing figure immediately stopped, and his heart beat rapidly in that moment, as if time had accelerated within him.

Thump!

Zaphkiel abruptly fell to the ground, stiff and utterly dead.

Michael watched in shock as Lin Jie easily took care of Zaphkiel... *It seems escaping from Lin Jie's grasp this time was impossible.*

Michael shut both his eyes. He controlled everything through light, and as a mass of elemental light, his power came with time, and now he was about to release all the power he had ever accumulated.

"Even Azir cannot escape the light of the sun. Did you wish to descend on Azir? Then I'll just destroy Azir and no one will be able to claim it!" Michael raved like a madman.

Joseph and Fitch headed amongst the masses, deployed defensive techniques and helped evacuate the people. A familiar figure drifted past Joseph's eyes, and he instinctively wanted to avoid that person.

— *Claire?* Joseph recognized his old comrade at once. However, Joseph was plainly dressed and hadn't trimmed his beard in months, so he assumed Claire wouldn't recognize him.

Joseph rushed into an alley along 23rd Avenue with an orphaned boy in his arms. "Ruud, hurry, take your grandmother and leave," Joseph said gently to the child, who was scared stiff and crying nonstop.

"Joseph?" A familiar voice was directed at him. He frowned and turned around... *I've been found out. It's really Claire.*

One of Secret Rite Tower's Great Radiant Knights. Though she was the least reputable among the ten, she was sincere and just toward the people and had impressive strength.

"Secret Rite Tower's personnel have also come," Joseph grimaced. After all, Secret Rite Tower was an organization that protected the common folk. Even if the upper echelon was corrupt, there were still many knights like Claire, Greg, and Winston that fought to protect.

It was ironic that Joseph had once been one too.

"It's really you. You aren't dead!" Claire walked over excitedly and grabbed Joseph's shoulders, her eyes clearly reddening.

Joseph couldn't be indifferent for such an old comrade-in-arms. He sighed resignedly. "Claire, I had reasons to fake my death. Given our long years of friendship, I beg you not to report my situation to Secret Rite Tower, and more importantly... don't let Melissa know."

Claire's face twitched slightly upon hearing Melissa's name. "Melissa... she..."

"What happened to her?!" Joseph became anxious and instinctively

grabbed Claire by her armor.

“She’s been sent to Central District Court after attacking Elder Valace. She said, she was avenging you,” Claire said, frowning.

“What?!” Joseph felt as if he had been struck by a bolt from the blue. Although he had indeed provided hints to Melissa about the evils of Secret Rite Tower, he hadn’t expected her to be so extreme as to directly take action.

Joseph suddenly felt difficulty breathing.

Chapter 437: Fruit Beneath The Inverse Tree

Chapter 437: Fruit Beneath the Inverse Tree

Central District central administration, 1000 meters underground.

Twisted and knotted branches hung down from the massive inverse tree. Directly beneath it, a round glass ball, with swirling white mist within, displayed a familiar scene.

More than ten old folk in white magician robes were huddled together, staring intently at the scene within the crystal ball—23rd Avenue.

A fierce battle was taking place on this street.

At the moment when the Zaphkiel's void domain was ripped apart, the battle hidden away in the void realm was exposed, and this made all the members of the central administration's adjudication bureau tremble.

"He's a dragon...?!" Asmodeus, who had been in charge of the adjudication's clerical work for several centuries, pointed a trembling finger at Lin Jie in the crystal ball.

"No." The oldest of the adjudication bureau that had tended to the inverted tree longest, Barr, stroked his flowing beard and said, "This is merely an ordinary shell, much like the young human shell previously."

"I've seen this shell before," Secret Rite Tower's Elder Valace, the so-called Knight King that had brought Melissa to the central administration, said.

Having once been cursed by the evil god and unable to move freely, Valace had now been reborn thanks to Melissa's flames. "This dragon is the Primordial Witch Silver's underling—Calamity Dragon

Bakak,” mused the Knight King. “It appears that the bookstore owner is connected to the Primordial Witches indeed.”

The others nodded and continued to watch the battle within the crystal ball. After the owner of the bookstore turned into a dragon, Michael and Zaphkiel began arguing, which was rather amusing.

“The Path of the Flaming Sword is just but a rowdy mob,” sneered another adjudication bureau member, Agathare. As the situation played out, the bookstore owner seemed amused by their argument and watched them quietly.

While Michael was distracted, Zaphkiel took the opportunity to fly into the void. However, the bookstore owner calmly raised a hand and casually clenched before Zaphkiel collapsed to the ground with a loud crash.

The members of the adjudication bureau beneath the inverse tree fell silent upon witnessing this scene...

“I recall that Zaphkiel became a Supreme-rank powerhouse very early on...” someone muttered softly. It was unfathomable that a Supreme-rank... could be squished like a bug by Lin Jie.

“Can anyone among us match up to the bookstore owner?” Barr spoke up abruptly.

That’s clearly impossible... Valace thought to himself as he watched the crystal ball closely. Then, his eyes suddenly widened.
“Joseph?!”

Valace was in disbelief as he saw Joseph well and alive, being ordered by Lin Jie to protect those insignificant and ordinary folk. “He’s actually alive?!” Valace’s cunning mind went to work at once, and he quickly realize the situation wasn’t good.

“We have trouble, Senior Barr,” the frowning Valace interjected. “Joseph is still alive. It’s no wonder Melissa suddenly found out the truth about Secret Rite Tower. He must have secretly informed his daughter. We have to kill Melissa now; otherwise, Joseph will follow the power within their shared blood and flame to find this

place.”

This inverse tree that guarded the whole Norzin and the Primordial Witch of Trees were the ultimate secrets of Azir.

Barr also panicked upon hearing what Valace had said and turned to the brainwashed Melissa. He had originally intended to keep her as a weapon, but it was impossible now.

“Kill her quickly,” Barr urged.

A blade appeared in Agathare’s right hand, and as the knife cut an arc toward Melissa, the entire underground space trembled like an earthquake had struck.

Rumble! Boom!

“What’s going on?!” Barr supported himself against the trunk. The empty space that only had this massive tree now looked as if it had been stomped on several times by a giant.

Barr’s eyes widened as he saw the white space near where everybody was suddenly tore open like it was a cheap piece of cloth. Suddenly, a red eye peered out from the tear, staring at the few of them as if they were dead objects.

“Dream beast!” Barr exclaimed in alarm.

Sure enough, a monster covered in a sticky blood-like slime emerged from the cracked fissure. One that could absorb all the joys and beauty of everything, making the world fall into despair—a monster that lived in the dream realm.

A first dream beast rushed out, then a second, a third... and more followed in succession. This was a scene that those of the adjudication bureau had imagined could happen.

Barr was shocked. He raised a hand, trying to stop the dream beasts, but there were just too many. How could filthy creatures like dream beasts reach where the Witch of Trees slumbered! He immediately looked at Valace.

“How could it be me!” Valace quickly defended himself. “These are creatures that only exist in the dream realm. Only the bookstore owner can do such a thing!”

Barr glanced at the crystal ball instinctively—Michael had turned into light, while Boss Lin was toying with him as if he were playing a game and not paying any attention to the adjudication bureau’s predicament.

So, who exactly released these dream beasts?! ...Barry was shocked, but at this point, he couldn’t care less.

These dream beasts that had suddenly appeared caught the bunch from the central administration off guard. While they controlled the whole of Norzin, claiming to be saving humanity and building Norzin, they were actually just descendants of nobles, nothing more than useless wine bags and food sacks. Their Supreme-rank numbers couldn’t even compare to the Path of the Flaming Sword.

Barr was able to manipulate the power of the tree to a certain extent. He waved his hand, and countless vines trapped the advancing dream beasts.

Valace took a few steps back, raised an arm, and drew several hexes in the air. A black projection appeared from the hexes, and countless dead soldiers of Secret Rite Tower slowly took form!

They had pale faces and were clearly dead. With a command from Valace, the dead legion rushed up like disposable tools to block off the advancing dream beasts.

“What’s this?” Agathare looked toward Valace with a frown. This black magician had actually turned all the deceased knights of Secret Rite Tower into his puppets. “You are really despicable...” sneered Agathare as he slashed at a dream beast.

“You flatter me.” Valace scoffed arrogantly. “When I was studying my body, I also studied puppetry, so I just made best use of what I had.”

Melissa furrowed her brows, having been disturbed by the messy

melee and opened her eyes to see utter chaos. The originally pure and white underground space had suddenly become a hellish landscape filled with countless vile dream beasts and knight-like zombies.

She was even more shocked to see familiar faces amongst those undead knights... There were even comrades that had sought to protect her during the battle at 67th Avenue. Hadn't they already been buried?

Everyone had sacrificed themselves because of their knight spirit and will to protect all of humanity...

...How could this be?! "Valace!!!" Melissa burned with anger. "Y-you bastard! I'll kill you!"

Valence was surprised to hear Melissa's shouts and immediately frowned, turning to the member of the adjudication bureau that had brainwashed Melissa earlier. "What's going on?" he asked. "Wasn't she supposed to forget everything and become our dog?!"

The one being questioned was also rather surprised. He had indeed brainwashed Melissa, but he didn't know that Melissa had been staring at Witch of Trees eyes during the process, which allowed her to avoid being completely brainwashed.

"Valace, you despicable scum!" Melissa cursed loudly.

Seeing Melissa like this made Valace chuckle and he turned to her. "I even turned your mother into a puppet, would you like to see her?"

Melissa was shocked beyond measure. If looks could kill, she would have devoured Valace alive.

"Forget it, you fool. Since brainwashing didn't work, let's just kill her." Valace raised his hand, gathering the power of black magic in his palm.

Krack—

A crisp sound echoed throughout the entire underground space.

Barr and the others instinctively looked toward the fruit hanging from the inverted tree. It seemed to have ripened, and cracks were even starting to show.

Chapter 438: Witch Of Trees

Chapter 438: Witch of Trees

The fruit beneath the inverse tree seemed to have existed for thousands of years, and the young girl within had been sleeping for a thousand years. She was the pillar of Norzin, the one that guarded the entire city of steel.

Barr, the de-facto leader of the adjudication bureau, accepted the mission of guarding this tree when he was very young, but in fact, he realized that the tree didn't need any care.

After waiting for more than a thousand years, Barr recognized that perhaps his role was just that of a key. A key to awaken the girl within the fruit—the Witch of Trees, Fraxinus.

Although Barr had control, he had never used this key. And now, the Witch of Trees had broken out of her shell?

While Barr couldn't be considered a good person, he, too, had quite some sentiments, having guarded the Witch of Trees for over a thousand years, among which the most important was fear. The witch who could shake the whole Norzin with a slight movement of her body was about to awaken. A heavy sense of trepidation filled his heart.

He pointed at everyone and cursed, "You disrespectful bunch! All of you will pay the price for disturbing Fraxinus."

Everyone looked at each other in confusion. Barr's face was filled with fright as if he were afraid of the witch's punishment. He immediately ran to the front of the witch's fruit, facing away from it, like he was condemning everyone.

Melissa watched the fruit in amazement. She recalled the smile of the girl within the fruit, and it didn't seem like she was a bad person.

A green arm stretched out from the broken fruit surface, smooth and pale like jade as everyone stared at the girl's movements intently.

The fruit was forcefully broken, and the girl within slowly sat up. Her skin was pale green, and her hair was like leaves floating in the breeze. Her flawless body seemed to be filled with the vitality of this inverse tree.

"Goddess..." Barr looked at Fraxinus in astonishment, then abruptly kneeling, knocking his knees on the ground in a particularly painful way. A strange smile appeared on Barr's aged face. "You've awakened, goddess."

Everyone saw Barr's actions and immediately knelt down, calling out, "Goddess."

Fraxinus heard their voices and slowly opened her eyes, revealing a pair of white eyes like pure snow.

Barr felt that those white eyes were strangely familiar. He recalled tales saying that the witch Fraxinus had green eyes, but he couldn't remember where he heard it from. He bowed his head respectfully again and dared not look directly into the witch's eyes.

"Pfft... Haha...!" Fraxinus guffawed all of her sudden, her pleasant voice resonating all around.

Barr trembled over and, in the next moment, he heard Fraxinus continue, "So, you humans really kneel and worship a tree, haa..."

Bar instinctively looked up—blood-stains had started bursting out of the great Witch of Trees Fraxinus' pale skin. It was as if countless blood vessels within her body had suddenly enlarged and thickened, turning into worm-like existences.

"You!!" Barr yelled, but before he could finish, the witch smiled, and branches, filled with the earthen fragrance of nature, turned into tentacles made of blood that shot into Barr's mouth and filled it up the moment he opened it to speak.

Those tentacles clung to his skin and drilled into his facial orifices.

Inch by inch, they made it beneath his skin, into his innards and finally his brain.

Although Barr hadn't yet comprehended the Law of his own domain, he was already a Supreme-rank transcendent being, yet in an instant, he was turned into a bloated bag of flesh that was completely devoured by those tentacles. The moment he was released, Barr fell to the ground as only an empty human skin.

The members of the adjudication bureau screamed. This wasn't the great and compassionate witch Fraxinus!

The blood vessels beneath the beautiful witch's skin continued to enlarge, finally bursting out as if breaking out of a shell. That flawless body seemed as if it was torn apart by some monster as blood gushed out from over a dozen gashes.

The witch's eyes lost focus and turned green again, while her hands pulled out a pipe embedded in her abdomen which was as thick as a branch, revealing a large hole from which her viscera spilled out.

A new pair of hands emerged from within, tearing apart the large hole further and ripping the Witch of Trees in half.

The inverse tree, which extended as far as the eye could see, transformed into a fleshly, bloody monster.

After the hands had ripped apart Fraxinus' physical body, no new body emerged. Instead, the entire inverse tree became its body.

Within the adjudication bureau, members who weren't yet Supreme-rank died on the spot, while the remaining ones felt a sense of absolute despair.

Valace, an ancient being that had lived for over a thousand years and had been cursed by Lin Jie, was trembling nonstop. His face and lips were pale, and his weak legs were on the verge of buckling at any moment. In a nearly tearful voice, he cried out, "Lady... Silver."

23rd Avenue.

As an embodiment of elemental light, Michael could be considered light itself. In other words, he wasn't that different from the Witch of Life, Witch of Night, and other entities that were the embodiment of Laws, perhaps even of an equivalent status.

Michael, a supreme being that controlled the light element, had completely given up on his dreams. But before that, he didn't want to let Lin Jie have any pleasure, even if it meant destroying Norzin.

Michael expanded his body, returning to his original form as he absorbed light from the sun. He would often call himself the sun, but he wasn't the actual one. However, today, he wanted to give it a try.

He wanted to thoroughly absorb all of the sun's light and utterly destroy Norzin.

His swelled up body became an extremely bright presence, causing Lin Jie to frown slightly. His dragon body needed to adapt, so he gave Young Mike some time to absorb the sun.

But that's about enough... Lin Jie scoffed and gently raised a limb, instantly blocking out all of the sun's light. The absorption came to an abrupt halt as the whole of Norzin was plunged into darkness.

Michael shuddered. Lin Jie seemed to be able to block out the sun and shield Norzin with just a casual raise of his hand.

"Is this what you wanted to do?" Lin Jie smiled indifferently. "To let Norzin be in eternal darkness? Unfortunately, I can do it too. And I can even create another sun."

Having said that, Lin Jie raised his dragon hand once more and the sun slowly reappeared. At the same time, a second sun appeared beside it.

Michael: "..."

"I've said it before. You can probably die now." A cold glint suddenly appeared in Lin Jie's eyes.

Michael had reverted back to his physical form out of fear and landed on his butt. He no longer had the prideful aura of a manifestation of elemental light and a great angel.

Lin Jie blinked as he watched Michael, the latter seemingly having lost his reason for living. For a moment, Lin Jie felt a tad reluctant to kill him, because it felt like he was bullying a young kid.

Then he saw Michael take out a book from his pocket that had the title **Bible** . He soon realized that this was a bible left behind by some member on his father's expedition team that had gotten lost in the underground palace.

It could be said that this **Bible** ruined Michael's life. Michael looked up and asked woodenly, "Are you God?"

Lin Jie didn't want to answer but still said, "No, the things in that book don't exist. At least, not in Azir."

Having said that, he was about to raise a hand to kill Michael, who was still in a daze, when he suddenly sensed a huge fluctuation of energy in the Central District. Lin Jie turned his head in that direction instinctively, and information immediately flowed into his mind.

"Silver?"

As those images and information entered Lin Jie's mind, he saw an incomparably beautiful lady standing within a snowy field composed of irises.

Her beauty was as divine as ever, and her silver hair spread out like silk on the flowers. Her perfect body rose and fell like snow, and even her slender, butterfly-wing-like eyelashes were pure white. In her hair was a white thorn crown.

And on her ear, she still wore the iris flower that Lin Jie had given.

Silver was the most beautiful within the pure white snow. She seemed to sense Lin Jie's gaze and turned around, bending her knees slightly and doing the polite human gesture of a curtsy that Lin Jie had grown to like. Those white eyes that Lin Jie were

familiar with sparkled like white gemstones as a beautiful smile appeared on her lips.

Chapter 439: Silver

Chapter 439: Silver

Silver shed the outer shell of the Witch of Life like it was a silkworm cocoon, and then turned the entire inverse tree into her own body.

Valace stood beneath the tree, gazing up at the strongest of the Primordial Witches. She was the fabled guardian of all monsters, and just looking at her made Valace feel a shortness of breath, as if he could die at any moment.

The last time he had felt like this was a thousand years ago, when he stood before that evil god.

The massive tree, which was originally fragrant with earthy aroma and lush green shade, now appeared like a blood pillar, with thick veins filled with blood that were constantly pulsating.

Melissa stared wide-eyed at the vines that bound her, which had transformed into rough, blood-red tentacles. Her face had paled from fright as she glanced at the wriggling mass of flesh that used to be the outer shell of the Witch of Trees.

The mass of flesh seemed to notice her gaze, and a head slowly grew out from it, with pale white skin and a pair of eyes that were incomparably beautiful but also cold and cruel.

Melissa gulped as everyone watched nervously as the squirming mass of flesh slowly produced a voluptuous woman. She had on white strap dress, which highlighted her curves like snowdrifts, and her silver hair was gorgeous like moonlight.

She brushed the iris flower on her ear, and every single of her movements seemed graceful and dignified. "Is this body more acceptable for both you and Boss Lin? It's actually my body from when I was in the dream realm," said Silver as she turned toward Melissa.

Her beauty was almost divine, almost not of this world, and more dazzling than the iris flower on her ear. Melissa was taken aback and opened her mouth in surprise, struggling to find her voice before finally stuttering out, “Y-yes...”

What Mu'en said to the Witch of Trees had awakened Fraxinus, and at the same time, awakened Silver. Rather than letting the Witch of Trees go insane and destroy everything, it was better to completely replace her.

Silver then frowned slightly and turned back. A powerful energy coming from the dream realm allowed her to sense the changes in Lin Jie. The corners of her lips curled up slightly, and she gave a polite curtsy in Lin Jie's direction.

After that, she turned her head back toward the frightened and confused members of the adjudication bureau.

“It's about time... Looks like the path I chose was a successful one.” Silver touched her forehead lightly, feigning a headache, but in truth, her lips were breaking into a grin.

Walpurgis, Life, Fraxinus... These former equals to her were all dead. Only Silver had chosen to believe in Lin Jie.

As early as the Second Era, when this visitor from the vast cosmos... that is, Lin Jie, arrived in Azir, Silver knew that neither herself nor the other three witches were a match for this traveling existence.

Perhaps ‘He’ was just tired and only needed to rest for a bit before leaving, so Silver chose to transfer all her underlings to the dream realm to avoid calamity.

This delighted everyone because Silver wasn't really welcomed by humans nor her fellow witches. Silver did want to share her thoughts to everyone, but this was met with disdain and fear.

Moreover, this evil god didn't have any intention of leaving.

Silver vaguely guessed that ‘He’ was nurturing his own consciousness and thus turned the entire underground of Azir into a massive womb, as if waiting for a certain conception.

If ‘He’ was conscious, communication with this existence could be possible, and with that, there might possibly be a chance; otherwise, Azir would only be doomed to wait for its destruction.

Silver wasn’t afraid of destruction. Contrary to the other witches that were versed in life and vitality, she was born intimate with death.

This sort of waiting was lonely and unpleasant... until that person came to her dream realm.

Thus, the reason that made Silver even more certain about the existence of that traveler’s will was actually... She brushed the iris on her ear and couldn’t help but smile. Now, the underground shaped by that evil god had become today’s Lower District, and ‘He’ had given birth to ‘His’ will by the name of Lin Jie.

Lin Jie... Silver mouthed that name silently.

Silver’s silvery eyelashes, which were like snow-covered pines, fluttered as she shot an indifferent gaze toward the people beneath that were cowering. With a slight smirk, she said, “I have seen it all. All who dares be an enemy of Boss Lin, whom I respect greatly, shall go to a place where the living cannot approach.”

Valace shuddered all over as his eyes widened in surprise and shock — *Is Silver actually an ally of Lin Jie? ...No, she’s clearly obsessed from the way she talks about Lin Jie .*

Valace was once corrupted by Lin Jie, yet he too had honed a strong will. The self-proclaimed Knight King was like a cockroach that just wouldn’t die no matter how many times it was struck.

He took advantage of the fact that there were a handful of Supreme-rank adjudication bureau members remaining and recklessly confronted Silver. Then, he stealthily left behind an undead knight in his place, like a cicada shedding its shell, as he tried to escape unnoticed.

“Valace!” Melissa stared at Valace lividly. She wished she could tear apart this once-revered man, who was actually more repulsive than

a cockroach.

Silver glanced at Melissa. Though she had been slumbering within the dream realm all this time, her existence within the real world made her close to all-knowing and all-powerful. Thus, she also knew about Melissa's situation.

"I hate humans, though it was them who loathed me first," Silver mused somewhat sadly, "but sometimes, the spirit of humankind can be rather fascinating. I suppose this was what my fellow witches admired?"

Silver sighed softly. "Boss Lin seems to really like being human, so I guess I should try liking them too. I'll start with you then, young lady." Silver smiled and gave a light wave of her hand, releasing Melissa from her restraints. Melissa charged shot forth like a raging forest fire, intent on seeking revenge for her parents at this very moment.

After watching Melissa chase after Valace and disappearing, Silver's gaze fell on to the remaining Supreme-ranks and she spoke in an icy tone, "What about you guys?"

"Our goddess, the Witch of Trees... was killed by you, monster?!" Agathare, one of the remaining Supreme-rank members of the adjudication bureau, manifested a blade of flowing water and charged at Silver.

Silver, despite having lived for a long time and having the profound thinking of a witch, could also be blunt as an individual. She chuckled lightly, and the vine-like tentacles behind her extended out and wrapped around Agathare tightly in the next second, like they were about to wring his blood dry.

The amount of tentacles was astonishing as they wrapped Agathare into a ball as everyone looked on in despair.

Swish—

A moment later, the ball of tentacles loosened and dispersed. But instead of seeing shriveled limbs or bones, what was inside were

ashes...

The ashes were swept up by a current, scattering and falling all over like snow, making Silver to appear even more ravishing.

The adjudication bureau's bunch of noble descendants cried out in horror and wanted to escape, but they saw flames erupt from where they were standing as the screams of Valace echoed through this space.

Silver didn't like those remnant limbs and bones. She often ate her prey thoroughly, turning them to bone ash, which she let scatter from the sky.

She revealed a slight smile, maintaining her elegance as a door appeared behind the nobles. That was a door to the dream realm.

The fragile and dilapidated door shook and seemed on the verge of collapse, as if it was being attacked by countless dream beasts from behind and could be broken through at any moment.

"As I promised, come out, my children..."

Silver's smile widened, and with a slight wave of her hand, the door opened, and a stream of bizarre and terrifying shadow-like dream beasts rushed out.

Any of these dream beasts had Supreme-rank power that most humans could never achieve in their lifetimes. Silver's resonant laughter rang out, and she seemed especially happy.

This laughter wasn't because she enjoyed slaughtering humans, but because she was delighted she no longer needed to stay in the lonely dream realm.

Boss Lin was right. Perhaps I like this world.

"Silver..."

A familiar voice from thousands of miles away sounded beside her ears. Silver's laughter came to an abrupt halt, and some worry showed in her eyes as she recalled that Lin Jie seemed to be close

with humankind.

“Boss Lin...” Silver uttered softly.

“Don’t worry, Silver.” Boss Lin’s all-knowing gaze could see through everything, including Silver’s doubts.

“These humans aren’t the sort that I like. I care more about you,” said Lin Jie gently.

Chapter 440: Dream And Reality

Chapter 440: Dream And Reality

“I care more about you,” said Lin Jie gently. “You’ve known who I was for sometime, right?”

Silver sighed. “Not really. I only learned of it just now.”

Hearing this made Lin Jie’s heart feel much more at ease. Silver was indeed a friend he cared about. At least, in Silver’s eyes, the friend she made was that ordinary and unassuming bookstore owner.

To Lin Jie, what was most important was maintaining his image as an ordinary bookstore owner to Silver.

At present, Lin Jie had adapted rather well to his dragon body and abilities. However, becoming a dragon and whatnot was indeed one of man’s dreams. And just thinking about it delighted him.

Lin Jie glanced down at Michael, who was close to losing his mind due to his dream shattering, and waved a hand, dissipating the latter’s soul.

Michael, the Path of the Flaming Sword’s creator, whose origins were from the ancient First Era, was completely dispersed.

Lin Jie carefully scrutinized his own body. Just a tiny bit of movement from him would cause quite a huge disturbance to 23rd Avenue.

Having dealt with Michael, Lin Jie then knocked his hand against the void and heard a frightful and shaky sound in no time—Metatron.

This elf that sat outside the world was an existence Michael had contacted after obtaining his Eye of Insight. And it was because he

got to know Metatron, who hid outside the world, Michael was able to obtain a magic eye from the ancient elf king's ruins, from his guidance.

"Have you seen me before?" asked Lin Jie.

Metatron didn't answer. Early on, in the Second Era of elves, Metatron had lost his home because of Lin Jie's arrival and the destruction of the elf kingdom. Thus, he had a lifetime trapped beyond the fringes of the world, only observing from the outside.

"Y-you are too high and mighty. I simply couldn't see..." Metatron said shakily, "But..."

"But what?" asked Lin Jie.

"The traces in the Lower District... I couldn't see clearly, a place covered by gray fog. It had the same source as your power," Metatron said softly.

Lin Jie was silent for a couple of seconds, then waved his hand. "Got it."

"A-aren't... you going to kill me?" Metatron's ethereal voice from beyond the world asked.

"Why would I kill you? Isn't being trapped beyond the world a sufficiently torturous punishment?" Lin Jie seemed to even flash the usual professional smile he had when he sat behind the bookstore's counter.

Just that he didn't know whether dragons could smile.

Metatron gave a painful sob. It hurt to be the ancient elf kingdom's only survivor that had unwittingly outlasted everything.

Lin Jie no longer bothered with Metatron and returned his attention back to Silver.

"Silver, you said you won." From a great distance away, Lin Jie transmitted his voice to Silver. "But perhaps it isn't over."

Deep beneath the Central District, Silver shuddered. “Boss Lin... You...”

“I am just a consciousness that still has to return to that body situated underground. There are still many tests ahead to reclaim that body and power of mine.”

Silver’s smile dimmed as she gazed at the white ashes dancing in the sky with a complicated look in her eyes. “No, you will win, and so will I.”

Having said that, and before Lin Jie replied, Silver, as if wanting to prove something, raised her hand—

A long time ago, due to the fear of Lin Jie’s might, she erected a wall to protect the dream realm. And now, it was about to be torn down...

Lin Jie saw Silver’s action and didn’t know what to make of it... He was only a traveling consciousness from the stars and needed to return to his original body. He didn’t know the answer to this conclusion, but Silver was desperate.

The dream realm had been devastated by Lin Jie’s subconscious corruption. Now, Lin Jie could stop that corruption, but what about the future? Would Lin Jie, after returning to his body, be able to maintain this will?

“Are you deciding for them? Just because you trust me doesn’t mean they do.” What Lin Jie referred to as them were the creatures that lived in the dream realm to hide from Lin Jie.

Silver revealed her loveliest smile ever in all the time she had lived.

“I am the guardian of all monsters and creatures born in the dream realm.” Silver’s beautiful voice floated into Lin Jie’s ears. “My choice toward you is also the choice of all dream realms.”

Silver raised her hand high, and a white light appeared in her palm, forming a column of light. The apex of the column then extended into a semicircular barrier.

This luminous barrier covered the whole of Norzin and could be seen from every corner of the city.

Silver closed her eyes and clenched the fist of her raised hand. And in the next second, the massive protective barrier shattered.

The wall between dream and reality crumbled in that instant.

At the very edge of Azir, where dream and reality intersected.

Thick layers of snow covered the mountain range like dragon scales. Strong gales whistled through the surrounding sky and clouds, yet the gray mist between the mountains could never be dispersed. The gray mist produced great forks of lightning and giant vortexes, but all of these were dwarfed by the massive throne-like mountain.

On the mountain, ice dust blasted into fog as frozen soil and ice fractured in unison, causing boulders to roll down.

A loud roar made the mountain shudder as a huge palm rose from the mountain, followed by a monstrously large body.

The giant king had awoken once again.

What had woken him up this time was the shattering of the wall that he had always guarded.

“Silver?” There was a hint of surprise in Slater Augustus’ almost stony eyes. “She’s actually tearing down the wall?”

Slater Augustus watched spider web-like cracks start to appear on the wall as massive amounts of aether, several hundred times more condensed than in the real world, started to leak out.

Once the door to the dream realm was opened, the entire real world of Azir would enter a new age.

An age teeming with opportunity and danger...

Slater Augustus had been here for many thousand years, watching

Azir through the ages.

Humankind had thrived because of the wall between dream and reality that Silver constructed, and Life had built a bonfire to protect humankind.

Now that the Witch of Life had fallen and the Witch of Trees that supported Norzin was absorbed by Silver, had the age of man passed?

Slater Augustus didn't dare guess the answer. The long era of humankind had allowed him to meet many interesting people. Had Silver seen more of them, perhaps she would have liked them too.

Slater stared into the starry sky and saw one brilliant light amongst the many stars as he was especially reminiscent of that particular little guy.

The star of Wilde's destiny was illuminating especially splendidly.

Slater Augustus breathed a sigh of relief. *Haa... You haven't let me down yet, little man.*

He rose from the mountain and seated himself on his throne, gazing at what was the former capital of his own people. Then, he drew out his rusty sword and leaned on it.

He looked at Wilde's star of destiny and finally closed his eyes in gratification.

At the same time, his body, long aged with time, gradually solidified with his immortal throne into a stone statue.

The mighty and eternal giant king had finally fulfilled his life's mission.

The great wall that had stood for thousands of years collapsed in an instant, and the vast aether rushed into the real world like a tide, sweeping up the giant king and his eternal throne, causing them to vanish.

Chapter 441: Boss Lin Left

Chapter 441: Boss Lin Left

Central District.

Vincent had completely toppled the entire Central Police Unit and slaughtered almost all the nobles who were not under Ji Zhixiu's control. The revolution was close to perfect.

Vincent gave a look to the working class folk that had been controlled previously. Now, the mind control on them had ended, and if the poor chose to strike back against this unfair world by targeting the nobles, it would entirely be their own choice.

Even after many of this working class were freed from mind control and became aware of the situation, they believed that whatever they were doing was right and didn't stop.

The skies of Azir had changed indeed. And in all aspects, a new era had dawned. Thus, it could be considered that Vincent, Mu'en, and the Ji father and daughter pair had won.

This revolution had been planned for quite some time. From the arrival of the Sun's Faith in the Central District, Ji Zhixiu's control of most aristocratic transcendent beings via the book auction, to Mu'en's infiltration of the Central District and instigating the Witch of Trees. Everything had been laid out in advance.

Vincent looked as the former director of the Central Police Unit's head rolled on the chopping board like a football as blood spurted out from his neck. This former director, a descendant of a noble family, had been nothing more than a useless drunkard.

Vincent smiled and left, hiding his achievement and reputation. He passed through the chaotic crowd, turned a few corners, and entered the bookstore.

Mu'en was wiping a glass. The whole bookstore was quiet, a great

contrast to the outside. A green bird of an unknown breed was nested beside the windows, and it was obvious to Vincent that it was Ji Zhixiu.

Ji Zhixiu hadn't come in person. She had been a little afraid that the central administration would discover their plot and prevent the revolution from proceeding smoothly.

"I should be able to report everything to Boss Lin in two days' time. I believe he would probably be delighted," said Mu'en as she put down the especially clean glass. The transparent glass reflected the delicate, doll-like face of Mu'en's as well as the faint smile that appeared when she mentioned Lin Jie.

She filled the glass with a chilled drink and pushed it to Vincent.

Vincent smiled and was about to take the glass when circular ripples like a halo appeared before the glass was even touched.

Vincent's eyes widened as he glanced up at Mu'en, who was also surprised.

"What's happening?" Vincent's raspy voice was filled with confusion. Mu'en contemplated for a while, then looked outside at the sky that was gradually turning purple. She took a deep breath and regained her composure. "The wall of dream has been taken down."

Vincent had also sensed it too. "Is this also a part of Boss Lin's plan?" Vincent and the green bird that Ji Zhixiu possessed asked in unison.

Mu'en, however, clutched her chest. A strange sensation had seeped into her heart. She gripped the door frame tightly, feeling uneasy.

Upon witnessing Michael die, Joseph clenched his fists. He then told his former colleague, Claire, about the whole truth regarding Valace.

Claire had an incredulous look on her face. Convincing her that

Valace was a bad egg would probably be hard. Joseph just hoped that she wouldn't bother him.

Seeing that Claire still wanted more explanations, Joseph pushed her aside and left the rescue of civilians to her.

"Boss Lin, please allow me to go save Melissa," Joseph ran to Dragon Lin Jie and implored.

Lin Jie glanced down at him and said, "It's fine. Silver likes that girl."

S-Silver? Joseph gulped. *That Primordial Witch?!*

"If you want to go, help Ji Zhixiu and the others." Lin Jie, who had regained some of his power, knew what Ji Zhixiu and Mu'en were doing.

Speaking of which, what were they imagining before I fused with Blackie? Lin Jie was speechless. Only now did he realize that these people relied on him to accomplish so many things.

However, they were still missing the last piece of the puzzle in their rebellion against the Central District... Of course, the Sun's Faith, which regarded Lin Jie as the only true god, could maintain the revolution. But that wasn't what Lin Jie wanted.

Just like what he had talked about with Ji Zhixiu and the others, Lin Jie wished for science and democracy. This would be the magical key that would allow humanity to survive after dream and reality were combined in the future.

Not to mention that Lin Jie still had to return to the Lower District and his original body. The memories of over two decades living on Earth had been the most important factor in shaping Lin Jie's personality, but 20 odd years was really too short.

Even a god as powerful as myself seems so unreliable... Lin Jie mocked himself silently. *That's why Joseph is more suitable than me to be the leader of humanity.*

Having gotten his instructions, Joseph immediately grabbed Fitch

and headed for the Central District. Meanwhile, the people on 23rd Avenue were being evacuated by Secret Rite Tower knights led by Claire.

After completely adapting to his dragon body, Lin Jie started flapping his wings and soared into the sky. Great Radiant Knight Claire frowned at Lin Jie's change. She couldn't stop Joseph nor Lin Jie, so she had to do her job as a knight.

While flying high above, Lin Jie gazed down at Norzin as well as his shabby bookstore that had now collapsed. It was as if everything had been all a flitting dream, like a cloud that couldn't be grasped. However, Lin Jie still smiled from the bottom of his heart.

Softly, he said, "Get home soon, Franca."

Franca, clutching the balance scale tightly and hiding out in the bookstore, opened her eyes. It had only been a few minutes, but there wasn't a single soul outside. It was as if the enemy had never appeared.

Boss Lin was also gone.

Joseph heard the same voice and stopped in his tracks. He turned and gazed at Lin Jie, and suddenly felt that Boss Lin was mightier than before but also more solemn. He couldn't understand the reason, but he had a mournful feeling that this might be the last time he would look at Boss Lin this way.

In fact, he felt something else as well—perhaps it was at this time that he had really gotten close to Boss Lin.

Boss Lin... He exclaimed inwardly, but Lin Jie had already flown far away...

Lin Jie flew across the whole of Norzin. As an otaku in both his lives, this was the first time he had really seen Norzin in full.

His heart skipped a beat and he immediately contacted Mu'en and said rather spiritedly, "Mu'en, I've a few things for you to do."

Mu'en, who was far away in the Central District, finally understood the reason for her palpitations. The moment she heard Lin Jie's voice, she recovered completely.

"Boss Lin, please give me your orders." Mu'en, in a matching white top and dress, still holding her chest, quickly stepped out of the bookstore and looked up at the sky with an expectant smile.

Truth be told, Mu'en didn't really like the color white because that color was all that she saw back when she was a homunculus. White apparatus, white installations, white skin, a sterile white room... All these things made her feel suffocated, till Lin Jie put on that white men's over-shirt on her.

She and Lin Jie had many stories about the color white too. She had even once listened to Lin Jie talk about the practice of melting snow to make tea and happily collected snow to try it out. In the end, she nearly vomited from the snow that was affected heavily by Norzin's pollution.

The scars caused by white in the first half of her life were instantly healed by Lin Jie's usage of white. And, she had always kept that white shirt.

"I'm heading to the Lower District. From now on, the bookstore is in your hands," said Lin Jie with a smile. "From now on, you're no longer an assistant. You're a mature manager, and the books and store are all yours."

"..." Mu'en's eyes lost their light, and she froze upon hearing this. After a long time, she finally uttered in a quavering voice, "No... No... I don't want..." Mu'en was incomparably flustered. She even raised her hand and waved it in front of her, unaware that beads of tears had started to seep out of her eyes. "I don't want the bookstore. I still... I still can't leave Boss Lin."

The corners of Lin Jie's mouth curled up slightly. "You're all grown up and a qualified manager now."

Mu'en lowered her head, her long black hair hanging down, creating a stark contrast against her white clothes.

“If you have any difficulties, look for Silver,” Lin Jie continued, “... I’m leaving.”

Silver...? Mu’en, who had inherited the memories of the Witch of the Night, knew who she was. *Had that witch been familiar with Boss Lin?*

“...” Mu’en opened his mouth, wanting to continue begging Lin Jie to stay, but she didn’t know what reason to use. This was the first time she felt discomfort in her throat, as if a huge rock was lodged there.

Something was rapidly growing inside this homunculus, silently sprouting.

She kept her head down and saw damp spots on the gray ground. She subconsciously raised her head and looked toward the sun high in the sky, and the tear stains on her pretty face were illuminated.

She thought she heard the sound of a dragon’s wings flapping up a gust.

Her Boss Lin had left.

Chapter 442: Spider Woman

Chapter 442: Spider Woman

Poisonous bugs and dark elves lurked in the land of eternal darkness. This place had once been the lair of the Brood-mother, Sandalphon.

Dark elves, with dark skin and silver hair, stuck their heads out from the densely packed windows of their beehive-like constructs when they heard footsteps outside.

The moment Cherry stepped into the Village of Dark Night, a somewhat nostalgic and sense of familiarity came flooding in as memories from her childhood replayed in her mind.

She only brought her maid, Bella, and a friend she recently made, Charlotte Casta.

Cherry turned her head, glancing at the slim, elegant noble girl dressed in white, who was following behind her silently. Those beady snake eyes of Charlotte, which had originally dark green, had now turned into ordinary light blue eyes.

Although Cherry didn't know how he did it, Wilde had clearly become the strongest black magician of the current era.

At this thought, Cherry felt most at ease. On the way here, Cherry had told Wilde how she had recognized him at first glance. It was all because of what Boss Lin had said—"It's a small world."

Wilde had been rather surprised by this. Cherry didn't know that Wilde had been convinced he had been abandoned by Boss Lin once more. When it came down to him and Joseph, Wilde had almost thought that Boss Lin had chosen Joseph, but he had survived in the end. It seemed like he was still useful to Boss Lin.

Cherry also told Wilde the reason they were heading to the Village of Dark Night. Wilde only had disdain when he heard about it. A

dead man like him was being used as a trap. *A brat... She's a brat.*

However, this was Boss Lin's test for him, and he definitely had to give a satisfactory performance.

Wilde switched out to Charlotte. They were almost symbiotic now. Their consciousness hadn't yet completely fused, but they were already overlapping, so both their thoughts were completely synchronized.

Cherry stopped walking. They had finally reached their destination. A small tavern, which could be considered one of the rare few means of entertainment for dark elves.

She pulled aside the entrance's curtain and entered to see a group of faces, mostly familiar to her. They seemed to be the bunch of dark elves that had bullied Cherry and her mother back then.

Dozens of dark elves were either standing around or seated in this small tavern. Seated in the middle of them was a beautiful elf lady, with wavy, silver hair and light purple eyes.

"My little Cherry, we haven't seen each other for a long time. Come, give me a hug." Stephanie's eyes lit up when she saw Cherry as if she was an elder who really doted on her juniors.

Cherry had an indifferent gaze and ignored her. She merely smirked and said, "Stop pretending, Stephanie. At this point, aren't you tired of acting?"

Stephanie, who used to be Sandalphon's confidant and had the moniker 'Spider Woman,' was synonymous with terror within Cherry's memories. Stephanie didn't care about Cherry's tone, instead, batting her fluttery eyelashes as she gazed behind Cherry. The blonde, blue-eyed noble lady behind Cherry was looking a little nervous.

"Friend of yours?" Stephanie licked her lips.

"Does that have anything to do with you?" Cherry raised an eyebrow and glared. "Let's cut the crap. I'll take my mother's ashes with me now."

“Ha-ha-ha!” Stephanie couldn’t help but laugh. “All dark elves hope to one day be buried in the Village of Dark Night. Your mother won’t be happy if you take her away.”

Cherry’s face turned dark upon hearing that. She hissed icily, “Who are you to represent my mother? She doesn’t want to stay in this damned place for even a minute longer!”

Stephanie’s smile froze. At the same time, the dark elves surrounded Cherry with hostile intent.

“Little bastard.” Stephanie’s pupils dilated slightly as she rose from her chair, revealing glittering crystals studded on her long skirt. “I’ll give you a chance. We now have a unique path to the Lower District. Our goal is to turn the Village of the Dark Night into a new Rolle Resources and have your Ash Chamber of Commerce as our pawn.”

Cherry raised an eyebrow and looked around, her expression unchanging. She would always prioritize using the ability that Boss Lin bestowed her, ‘Enchanted Heart Seal.’ However, just looking at Stephanie’s face made Cherry itching to leap up and tear her apart.

In a certain sense, her mother’s death was connected to this old hag.

The Village of Dark Night had never been Cherry’s territory. Also, ‘Enchanted Heart Seal,’ could only serve as a charismatic power that allowed her to lay some groundwork. But now, she didn’t have much time left.

In fact, there were too many unfavorable circumstances for Cherry right now. Perhaps leaving at once was the right choice.

But... Cherry really felt like killing Stephanie. Thus, she looked Stephanie straight in the eye and scoffed, “Humph, dream on, idiot.”

An ominous glint flashed across Stephanie’s eyes as she muttered, “Then you and your mother shall stay here for all eternity.”

As soon as she said that, the dark elves all around, who had been sharpening blades, used their transcendent abilities in succession

with merciless intent to kill. However, Cherry's little face displayed a defiant look.

Stephanie could easily see that Cherry didn't have any transcendent talent. So, why was she that confident? Was it because of that delicate noble lady she had brought along?

Stephanie observed the young lady behind Cherry. That timid noble revealed a pair of mesmerizing, dark green snake eyes, but Stephanie felt that she was completely harmless while analyzing the situation cautiously.

"You little bastard... Ugh!" Stephanie was about to curse when she suddenly felt a sharp pain throughout her body. She instinctively lowered her head to see that the abilities and blades of her subordinates that had been attacking Cherry had somehow pierced her body.

Stephanie's violet eyes widened in disbelief, and her subordinates were horrified.

"Humph." Cherry's young face was full of killing intent. "Go to hell, Stephanie."

'Enchanted Heart Alteration'—this was a higher form of 'Enchanted Heart Seal.'

From the moment she entered the tavern, Cherry had used her ability to influence all inside. This made one, including Stephanie, subconsciously swap the identities of Cherry and Stephanie.

The dark elves thought they were attacking Cherry but were, in fact, targeting Stephanie instead. Stephanie's body was now riddled with holes, and she still had the look of being taken by surprise.

Cherry let out a sigh of relief. Stephanie's mental resistance was higher than hers, but she had underestimated Cherry too much, and that was why Cherry had been able to influence her heart.

With blood trickling down her wrists, Stephanie hunched over from her serious injuries. However, she started chortling. "Little bastard, I nearly underestimated you."

Cherry knew that she wouldn't be able to kill Stephanie in one go.

"Ha-ha-ha!" Stephanie broke into full blown maniacal laughter. Then she raised her head. The top of her scalp started to engorge, and round, black spider eyes began to grow on her wide forehead like bubbles. They were densely covered with short hairs, but the lower half of her face was still as good-looking as ever.

Cherry's eyes widened as she watched Stephanie's body begin to expand. The gorgeous crystal-embedded gown burst at the seams as flesh-colored spider limbs grew out of Stephanie's waist and abdomen. She laid on the ground as her belly enlarged, becoming a huge spider's abdomen.

Stephanie had become a massive flesh-spider.

"Become my food, Cherry!" Stephanie was salivating. Her high-pitched voice was gratingly sharp, like fingernails scratching against a chalkboard. The massive flesh-spider continued to rave maniacally, "I didn't want to use this body, but you forced me to!"

Cherry nearly threw up seeing Stephanie's disgusting body. Stephanie was now completely naked. White spider silk shot out of her butt and covered the entire tavern. In no time, the entire place had become her nest.

Cherry subconsciously stepped back and nearly fell down. Bella quickly stood in front of Cherry and lifted her maid's skirt, pulling out some daggers which she threw at Stephanie.

The blades whistled forward, but unfortunately, these were all like mere tickles, incapable of even cutting through the thin spider silk.

"Lord Wilde!" Bella gritted her teeth and called out, imploring the seemingly unperturbed 'Charlotte' on the sofa.

Charlotte revealed an ominous smile and praised hoarsely, "The aura of the Brood-mother, Sandalphon. I believe you stole her power, right? Not bad, killing it would be a waste. You would make a beautiful specimen."

Specimen? You've got a really unique taste... Cherry felt relieved to

see Wilde so calm.

Stephanie stiffened as she subconsciously looked at Charlotte.

This little lady had been clearly harmless before, but now, her Supreme-rank power had practically engulfed the entire Village of Dark Night. The powerful aether within her body was in any way inferior to that of Sandalphon, whom Stephanie had once served.

Chapter 443: Feel The Grace Of God

Chapter 443: Feel The Grace Of God

Every single one of Stephanie's beady spider eyes focused on Wilde as her face paled. "Who exactly are you?" she asked.

Wilde replied with a sinister chuckle, "The person about to dismember you and turn you into a specimen. In other words, the one who will become your master."

Meanwhile, Bella led Cherry away from Stephanie and the two hid in a corner.

Stephanie was now a flesh spider. She had the form of a spider, but her outer appearance was still human. Stephanie, who had been confident after devouring part of Sandalphon's power, now felt a little timid in the face of Wilde's immense strength.

She opened her mouth, her lower jaw widening, and a white substance spurted out from glands within her throat that turned into webbing the moment it left her mouth.

Wilde scoffed indifferently, and a blank ink-like gas, carrying with it the terrifying aura of death, slowly rose all across the room.

Thick, slippery tentacles appeared at the bottom of Charlotte's white dress in an instant. Wilde didn't bat an eyelid, but there was a mocking smile on his face. His upper body maintained the graceful beauty of a young noble lady, while his lower half was now all tentacles.

"Urghh," Cherry gagged as she watched from the corner. These two were monsters.

Wilde had indeed fulfilled his duty and protected Cherry according to Boss Lin's orders. It was just that Stephanie was way too weak in

the face of the black magician, whereas Wilde had already awakened the domain of his 'Eventuality' Law.

In the history of mankind, transcendents that could comprehend their own power of Law could be counted with the fingers on one's hands. Wilde was one of them.

It would be too easy for him to kill Stephanie, but he wanted to see how much of Sandalphon's power she had absorbed; thus, Wilde actually went back and forth when fighting her. The gulf between the two of them was like a special forces soldier with a heavy arsenal facing off against a child wielding a small knife.

Webbing shot from Stephanie's body flew toward

...

We are unable to load the verification.

Please unblock any scripts or login to continue reading.

Verify below to continue reading

Please login to continue reading.

Chapter 444: Silver Dragon

Chapter 444: Silver Dragon

It was obvious that the black cover was photocopied, and it even looked a little cheap.

A photocopying machine had been obtained through illegal smuggling to the Lower District, and with a devoted heart that person accepted the guidance from the god... and made several copies of that book. The power of the book's words didn't decrease at all, and instead was replicated many times.

Making multiple copies of Boss Lin's book was something even Wilde didn't dare dream about, yet these people had actually done it.

However, it wasn't that easy to understand Boss Lin's book. Only two or three people out of several dozen in the Lower District had this book.

The leader of the Lower District monsters, whom Stephanie had called 'Stone,' widened his beastly eyes. The squirming tentacles on his chin seemed to dance agitatedly as if unable to hide his excitement. He had neither eyelashes nor eyelids, and his eyes were glossy like that of a fish.

This was the first time they had set foot in the Upper District. Precisely put, the Village of Dark Night wasn't part of the Lower District but a transition area between the Upper and Lower District.

However, this was indeed the Church of Pestilence's first step. Allowing the residents of the Lower District to step back once more into the Upper District... This was the Church of Pestilence's ambition.

Moreover, the dark elves were just their pawns. The ones who really wanted to open the dark elves' path wasn't Stephanie, but the Church of Pestilence.

The original plan had been for Stephanie to kill Cherry and work with another Ash Chamber of Commerce higher-up to ally with the Church of Pestilence in the Lower District. However, it was laughable how she hadn't even been able to deal with Cherry.

That once ambitious mind of the 'Spider Woman' was now just a puddle of brain mush.

Wilde didn't even need to think to know that the current situation was a dog-eat-dog. However, that jet-black book cover was like a black hole, sucking away almost all of his strength.

The leader of the black cloaks opened his book and continued to read aloud those terrifying words.

Those words were like pieces of molten iron that flew into Wilde's mind, continuously portraying frightening images that far exceeded human imagination. Wilde even moaned in pain as Stone's lips twitched nonstop, the latter speaking so quickly that the corners of his mouth were foaming.

The words turned his voice into a shrill incantation that made the entire room tremble.

Cherry hid behind Wilde and used the Enchanted Heart Alteration to make herself forget her own existence, losing her senses, including her hearing, as she curled up.

Wilde tugged at the hems of the dress he had on, and at the back of Charlotte's head, a face of an old man slowly grew out from within her long tresses.

Wilde took several steps back consecutively and was unable to launch any counteroffensive. He himself might be able to find himself within the scripture that was Dream of Chaos, but Charlotte wasn't able to endure it much longer.

Wilde suddenly let go of himself, taking off Charlotte's skin as if taking off a layer of clothing. His body burst through this tavern, and several of these black cloaks were blown away by the aether released from this 'molting.'

Wilde had turned into a bloody mass of flesh that resembled a giant octopus. Tentacles spread all over the tavern, as if the place had become its nest.

The huge commotion at this tavern attracted the attention of all the dark elves in the Village of Dark Night. Silver-haired, dark-skinned elves came out of their hive-like den houses and gathered around the tavern, forming small groups and discussing animatedly.

Stone, who had been thrown out of the tavern by the aetheric force, got back up to his feet. He noticed Wilde's sorry state, incapable of even maintaining Charlotte's will, and scoffed disdainfully. Then, he turned around to look at the dark elves all around.

"The Village of Dark Night will soon become a new gathering spot for the Church of Pestilence," said Stone with a sinister smile. "Kill all these elves."

Having given his order, he turned his sights back to Wilde, who was still struggling in pain, and said, "Accepting our Lord's judgment is painful. If he can't withstand this test, naturally, he will die."

The surrounding cloaked men drew back their hoods in succession, revealing ancient, malevolent faces with beastly eyes and squirming tentacles on their chins.

The dark elves had been scrutinizing these cloaked newcomers strangely, but screamed the moment they saw their faces. Just a look at their appearances would cause a great deal of mental strain to ordinary people.

The sight of these terrified elves gave rise to a great sense of achievement for these Lower District denizens. It was just as their Lord had said—those in the Upper District couldn't even look directly at them.

The reason was simple. It was because this was all a mutation bestowed by the gray fog, and this mutation had chosen them, causing them to evolve.

Just as these dozen were about to begin their slaughter, a shooting star burning with pale flames appeared in the sky beyond the Village of Dark Night, lighting up this place that never saw day.

BOOM—

The entire Village of Dark Night shook violently as if a giant meteor had just struck.

The fleeing dark elves and black cloaks about to begin their massacre were all stunned. Regardless of whether they were the weak dark elves or the fanatical zealots believing in their one true god, everyone stopped whatever they were doing, instead exchanging confused glances caused by this sudden change.

The bright shooting star fell on the ‘Forest of Ashes’ that lay on the Village of Dark Night’s edge. Suddenly, the Forest of Ashes burst into flames as an ancient-looking silver dragon emerged from the blazing fires.

The ancient dragon was as thin as a withered old tree. ‘His’ four claws landed on the ground, accompanied by silver flames. The dragon had such a dazzling side that it was impossible to look at ‘Him’ directly. ‘He’ roared, and the scent of calamity was carried within the breath it exhaled.

Any single person here could understand how horrifying this dragon was, but they were incapable of escaping.

Those aged, indigo eyes surveyed the Village of Dark Night before ‘He’ started to slowly make for the village.

“What’s this...” Stone stared at the massive silver dragon in panic. “Is this the guardian deity of the dark elves?” His question was quickly refuted, but in any case, this silver dragon’s power frightened him to the extreme, and his hand that clutched their scripture tightly started trembling.

He swallowed hard and quickly started reciting, “My ancient...” The silver dragon eyed the book in Stone’s hand and inclined ‘His’ head in a strange manner. ‘His’ doubts lasted for a mere second as

the answers he sought came to him at once. If this dragon had eyebrows, 'He' would be furious.

'He' gazed into the tavern at Bella's cold corpse, and Wilde, who was moaning in pain. With a thought, the book held by Stone burned up.

Then, in the next moment, the silver dragon's body seemed to turn into countless threads, and these silver threads were quickly sucked together in an orderly manner to form a small vessel.

And this vessel gradually transformed into the form of a young and refined-looking man.

Chapter 445: A Place Darker Than The Village Of Dark Night

Chapter 445: A Place Darker Than The Village of Dark Night

The grotesque man in black robes was unwilling to let go of the holy scripture even after it burst into flames. He clutched the book tightly till the silver-white flames on it engulfed his body as well.

Flames pounced on him and his comrades, their dancing tongues like creeping tentacles, or like avaricious thorns that clung tightly to the necks of these people.

Lin Jie withdrew his body and transformed into the appearance of the young man he had been using for several years. He glanced down at his body, and every strand of hair was the same as before. Even the loose threads on his pants were clearly visible.

Lin Jie felt much better. He raised his hand and looked at his palm, seeing the familiar lines that seemed to have hinted at his destiny a long time ago.

Memories had come flooding back after fusing with Blackie, and Lin Jie's personality made him accept his own fate rather easily.

Regardless of the death of his parents, his transmigration, or the fact that he was an evil god, Lin Jie had always possessed an extraordinary ability to accept things.

After reverting to his human body, Lin Jie finally looked toward those beings that were holding ***Myths & Legends***, a book which he had written. Or more precisely put, the title of this book ought to be ***Dream of Chaos***. Those fanatical zealots that refused to let go were being incinerated to ashes.

Lin Jie silently headed toward the burned ashes, and the surrounding dark elves made way for him out of fear. For them, escaping was impossible. There was no other place in this world

that could accommodate them besides the Village of Dark Night.

Moreover, the dark elves had also witnessed Lin Jie transform from a silver dragon into a human as well as wiping out the enemies that had tried to exterminate them. On top of that, the overflowing aether that Lin Jie had was unimaginably huge. If it had to be quantified, it was as much as what a hundred Wildes possessed.

The dark elves silently stepped aside, opening a wide path for Lin Jie to walk through. As Lin Jie passed, the dark elves knelt on the ground successively. Lin Jie glanced at them but didn't halt their actions, and finally reached the burning men and books.

Seeing the burnt remains of those books, he couldn't help but sigh as he thought to himself, *Though **Myths & Legends** was viewed as **Dream of Chaos** by them, the contents were nothing more than some weird dreams of my past... Even a fairy-tale perhaps. But they somehow interpreted it as a slumbering god about to awaken and destroy everything.*

From a certain sense, this book was indeed a standard of judgment which distorted and worsened their greed. *The Lower District also needs to be purged and revolutionized as well...* lamented Lin Jie.

With the black cloaked man's reciting of the holy scripture stopped, Wilde gradually returned to his senses and slowly returned to Charlotte's form, sprawled on the tavern's floor, panting heavily while regaining his strength. Then, he saw a familiar figure.

His eyes widened as he struggled to open his mouth. "Boss... Lin..."

Lin Jie nodded.

"I'm sorry, Boss Lin, I made you..." Wilde wanted to get up but couldn't after making several attempts. Suddenly, he felt a powerful force flowing from the back of his collar, and a strong energy filled his body.

He got up immediately and gazed at Lin Jie. *Boss Lin wouldn't have actually come personally to the Village of Dark Night to save me, would he?*

...Wilde immediately started to speculate in his mind. Moreover, it didn't seem that Boss Lin was in a good mood, and even his aura was different from before.

If he had to describe it, Wilde would probably guess that Lin Jie had probably 'watched enough drama and gotten sick of role-playing games and was about to do something serious'.

Wilde's gaze fell on the black cloaks from Lower District. *Humph, it's indeed these bunch of naive fellows that have offended Boss Lin, huh?*

Wilde came up with a handful more conjectures. Then, after selecting the most reasonable one, he stood aside deferentially.

At this present moment, Lin Jie was aware of what was going through Wilde's mind and forcefully stopped his lips from twitching.

It's no wonder you were able to do so much when I knew nothing, even saying that I was guiding you... Haa, your imagination is indeed top-notch, Wilde...

"You've protected Cherry well," Lin Jie said.

Wilde knew that Boss Lin was no longer playing the role of bookstore owner anymore and thus responded earnestly, "It's all that I ought to do. It was your will that guided me. Also, I'm grateful that you chose me in that battle." Wilde was somewhat emotional.

Lin Jie waved his hands and rebuffed, "I can't take credit for this. Surviving was due to your teacher's will. However... you probably won't be able to see him anymore."

Wilde was slightly stunned, and disbelief filled his eyes. He couldn't imagine how that majestic body could ever fall.

He suddenly realized his mistake and immediately gazed up at the dark sky of the Village of Dark Night. The stars above were dim, and the life star that symbolized his teacher had vanished.

He clenched his fist tightly in disbelief and felt a hard object on his

thumb. The ring that his teacher had passed on to him had already inherited all of that ancient giant king's power. This was the final legacy his teacher had bestowed upon him.

At that moment, Wilde seemed to awaken. Gazing at Lin Jie's still ordinary-looking back, he immediately understood the existence of that individual, which gave him an even greater shock.

Lin Jie passed by Bella, and a green light glowed in his hand, healing the wound on Bella's back. The loyal maid, whose body had already turned cold, twitched her fingers.

Lin Jie continued forward and saw Cherry curled up in the corner like a tiny hedgehog. With a smile, Lin Jie squatted down and patted her little head as if he was knocking on a door, gently relieving 'Enchanted Heart Alteration' that Cherry had placed on herself.

Cherry slowly opened her tearful eyes and, upon seeing Boss Lin, flung herself into his arms like a little flying squirrel.

"Boss Lin! Uwaaaaah! You are so late!" She hugged Lin Jie tightly and began to cry.

Lin Jie had no choice but to pat her back gently and comfort her. "Since you knew that I would come, did you have to be this frightened?"

Cherry looked up, seeing Lin Jie's nonchalant demeanor, and immediately realized that she had gone too far. She hurriedly withdrew from the embrace and choked, "B-B-Bella, she..."

Lin Jie raised his chin and pointed to the side where Bella had just gotten up from the ground, looking utterly bewildered.

"Bella!" Cherry pounced on Bella.

Lin Jie stood up and noticed the uncertain look on Old Wil's face. At once, he understood that the latter had accepted the ancient Giant King's memories.

Like Silver, the Giant King knew Lin Jie's identity and had imparted

everything, including his memories, principles, and standards, to his disciple. Perhaps this was his last lesson to his precious disciple. There was no better teacher than him.

Lin Jie smiled warmly at Wilde, who immediately bowed respectfully. The old black magician felt ashamed at his fear toward Boss Lin just now.

“Boss Lin...” Cherry wiped away her tears and forced a smile. “Why have you come to the Village of Dark Night all of a sudden? ...Have you really come to save me?”

Partly... To be precise, I came to save you because it's along the way... However, this answer will probably hurt Cherry's feelings. What she wants as an affirmation.

“Are you intending to go to the Lower District?” Wilde interjected.

“I’m preparing to head there.” Lin Jie breathed a sigh of relief. *A s clever as ever, Old Wil .*

The dark elves outside were whispering, oblivious to everything that was about to happen. Lin Jie turned to Wilde and Cherry. “I’ve already said goodbye to everyone else. You guys are the only ones left. The Village of Dark Night is also my last stop before I leave.”

Cherry’s eyes widened, feeling at a loss. She asked cautiously, “Are you not coming back?”

Lin Jie didn’t answer. It was rare for him to not have an answer after becoming a god.

“Can you not go?” Cherry pulled on Lin Jie’s shirt. “It doesn’t matter who or what you are. All I know is that you are the first ray of light in my life.”

Lin Jie rubbed her tiny head and said, “There’s something I must do. If I succeed, we will meet again one day. If you too have such conviction, then go change Norzin. Let the Ash Tree of Commerce replace Rolle Resource and end the monopoly.”

Cherry froze for a moment, then nodded resolutely.

Lin Jie let go of her hand and stepped outside the tavern. The dark elves had seen Lin Jie's strength with their own eyes, and at first, were afraid. But he had also been the one who had saved the Village of Dark Night.

"There's no need to kneel. From now on, in Norzin, you all don't have to kneel to anyone," Lin Jie spoke softly, and his words were light, like a gentle breeze blowing through this light-less land.

At some point, Lin Jie pulled out a cloak and draped it over himself before heading toward the darkest recess of the Village of Dark Night.

Chapter 446: Lower District

Chapter 446: Lower District

Lin Jie headed through the half-opened path that led to the Lower District.

He could transform into a dragon at will, but he still maintained his human form. He stepped onto a simple and temporarily constructed elevator that creaked with every movement as it made its way down the narrow and confined elevator shaft where one could only see layers upon layers of black rock.

Lin Jie stepped out of the elevator and traversed along the underground passageway. Were he human, Lin Jie would have a very bad feeling about this place. He could sense familiar scents and auras that were very similar to his source of power.

Lin Jie squinted slightly and could make out the gray fog that spread throughout the Lower District.

While the Lower District felt like a bad place, at this moment, Lin Jie felt like he was truly stepping on the ground.

The entire Upper District was a steel machine set upon the Lower District. All of its mechanisms were built on the blood and tears of the latter. To put it in a simple analogy, if the Upper District was a running steam train, then the Lower District was its burning furnace. The resource was coal, but it was ignited with humans.

Lin Jie concealed his form and continued forward through this secret passage. He imagined that he would one day be able to leave this pathway, but gradually realized that he had no way of leaving because the entire Lower District was within this tunnel.

This was a world formed by dark intersecting mining tunnels. The ground was muddied and sloshed with every step. The tunnel walls were constantly seeping water and covered in moss. This place was in eternal darkness, without a hint of green or sunlight.

Further ahead, Lin Jie could make out tattered tents and beds set up in stone buildings constructed in the mine. Due to there being little temperature disparity underground, people here only had a single-person accommodation, and everyone only wore black robes.

Lin Jie adjusted his black cloak and revealed himself. Unfortunately, no one cared.

Hunched residents, who were like walking corpses, held pickaxes and tools, and the clanging of mining resonated everywhere. Lin Jie noticed that each of them had their faces tightly wrapped in dirty bandages, and only the tentacles on their chin squirmed weakly as if they were dead.

However, all of them had eyes like wild beasts. Lin Jie frowned as he observed these Lower District residents. Even if he hadn't come to intervene, these beastly eyes would one day destroy the whole of Norzin.

They were oppressed by layers upon layers of exploitation, trading their lives in exchange for scarce food and resources just to go on living.

Black cloaks were ubiquitous within the Lower District, and the people here seemed to have not considered any other colors, or perhaps because pure black was the only suitable one for the Lower District's position.

This was a place even darker than the Village of Dark Night.

In the past, Lower District denizens only cared about completing their daily tasks quickly so they could go to the designated point in the Upper District to exchange some food. This was especially so in recent years, with the sharp decline in resources. Those that were late would need to mine with greater effort, so they didn't pay any attention, nor even notice that Lin Jie lacked tentacles on his chin.

Survival was their priority, and other matters were put on hold.

"Haa... It's practically impossible to sell books here..." Lin Jie was bumped into by a man frantically grabbing for ore. He watched as

others scrambled as frantically and sighed. “I’ll still have to try my best...”

Lin Jie continued forward. *Perhaps I could pick a storefront.*

With this mindset, Lin Jie walked for hours and finally arrived at a sparsely populated mine. Here, he saw many women and children collect resources. Apparently, fit and strong men wouldn’t come here because of the scarce resources.

This place isn’t bad, it’s nice and quiet... Lin Jie couldn’t help but feel a little pleased.

Opening a bookstore in this area seemed like a decent idea. Lin Jie didn’t care about the environment, no matter how harsh it was.

Suddenly, he felt a tugging on the hems of his cloak, but when he turned his head, he didn’t see anything.

“Hey! Red’s here!” Lin Jie heard a child-like voice and immediately lowered his gaze to see a little girl that looked like a mushroom.

The girl also wore a black cloak, but she wasn’t covered in dirty bandages. Her skin wasn’t greenish like most Lower District denizens but slightly reddish, though it had the same rough, scaly texture as others.

This girl seemed slightly different from the other emaciated residents—she was a little chubby, and her round face even looked a little funny when paired with such a primal, scary, and grotesque appearance.

She’s probably the sort that can put on weight just by drinking water... Lin Jie mused, mesmerized by the chubby and cheerful tentacles swaying on her chin. It was ridiculous that even a creature corrupted by the evil god could be such a funny sight.

“Can’t you see me? ...You’re the s-sort that’s c-conde... right?” The little girl who called herself Red frowned, forgetting the word she was trying to say.

“Condescending.” Lin Jie helped her.

“Ah, right! It’s condescending!” Red’s face lit up, then suddenly remembered she was supposed to be angry and immediately withdrew her smile.

“You, stop being condescending!” Red exclaimed loudly. “Red is just... just a little short.”

“Do you see clearly now?” As Red said that, she raised her hand to mark her height, which was only as tall as Lin Jie’s thigh.

“I see it.” Lin Jie chuckled.

Red then let go of Lin Jie’s cloak and folded her arms. “You snuck in from the Upper District, right? It’s too much to swagger around like this. Don’t you know how to be more careful?”

“Careful about what?”

“The clothes on you, and the color of your skin... Upper District people always look down on us. Humph, but actually, they’ll lose their minds immediately when they touch the fog. I’ve seen several Upper District people get killed by them because of this.”

The little girl then put her hands on her lips and pouted, the few strands of chubby tentacles on her chin looking like fried intestines.

Them? ...Ah, I see. Lin Jie suddenly realized that some of those that snuck in weren’t killed by the corruption but by the Lower District denizens instead.

Were there ones who dared to rebel amongst the blindly oppressed?

“Then, why did you remind me?”

“Because... because I want you to bring more people from the Upper District here! Don’t you Upper District people like to make friends?” the young girl said matter-of-factly. Then she pointed her bone knife at Lin Jie and said menacingly, “You are now my hostage. Come with me back to my shack, and don’t let anyone see you, or else I’ll kill you.”

Lin Jie was slightly surprised. He had initially wanted to open a

bookstore inconspicuously and wait for people to come to him. However, life would occasionally bring about interesting encounters. If he always relied on his so-called omniscience, he would miss out on a lot of surprises.

Thus, Lin Jie smiled and said, "Alright."

Red tugged Lin Jie's clothes and occasionally told him to behave, but Lin Jie didn't seem to be afraid, unlike those arrogant people from the Upper District... Though Lin Jie did seem a little arrogant.

But it's not the same sort of arrogance, thought Red to herself. It's the sort that makes people can't help but feel that he is powerful, right?

Chapter 447: Red

Chapter 447: Red

“Pull your hood lower,” Red kept away her bone knife and quietly mouthed to Lin Jie.

As she wished, Lin Jie pulled his hood down and looked at this entire closed-off community. The conditions here were even more unpleasant than the first place Lin Jie had seen.

While there had still been some densely packed constructs made of mud in the previous area, here, there were only some makeshift tents built using plastic tarps. Moreover, there was a very strong stench of corpses.

Lin Jie frowned, then heard Red behind him ask, “How long have you been in the Lower District?”

Lin Jie obediently answered, “According to Norzin time, only about five hours.”

Upon hearing this, Red broke into a smile and asked, “Take out all the food on you quickly!”

Lin Jie immediately raised his hands, showing his empty palms. “I’m really sorry. I didn’t think about this when I came.”

“Liar!” Red’s round eyes opened wide, though her beast-like eyes on her face didn’t seem very threatening.

“I really didn’t,” Lin Jie replied in exasperation.

Red’s eyebrows scrunched up and she was a little pissed. She had finally robbed someone from the Upper District, but her target didn’t even have food.

Seeing Lin Jie this way, Red didn’t think he was lying and uttered angrily under her breath, “I heard that people in the Upper District hate each other and often set up traps to rob and cause harm to

each other... This guy looks stupid, could he have been robbed by his own kind?"

Lin Jie watched Red in amusement.

"That means you probably haven't eaten for quite a while, right?" Red asked hesitantly after her mini tirade.

Lin Jie nodded without hesitation. "And, I can eat a lot," Lin Jie said earnestly. "If I don't eat in the next hour, I'll most likely die."

"Die?!" Red exclaimed in fright.

"My grandma went to trade for food, and if things go well, she should be home tonight." Red pushed Lin Jie on and let him into a small makeshift tent, which only had two beds and a cabinet inside.

"I can share some with you when she returns, but remember, I just want to keep you from starving to death."

The small tent was so cramped that Lin Jie would knock things to the ground if he turned slightly. The floor was all mud, with only two tree branches stuck into the ground to support the waterproof tarp. On top of that, there was also a strong rancid smell of decay and a pungent smell of urine lingering in the air.

Lin Jie glanced at the wooden beds. The sheets were caked black with dirt, and there was a layer of gravel lying on the bottom of the cup by the bed.

Lin Jie sat down and took a proper look at Red.

Red had a round face and short stubby tentacles on her chin. She was different from the others, for the tentacles on her chin often danced around excitedly.

"Why are you staring at me?" Red asked, feeling slightly embarrassed.

Although Lin Jie was plain-looking, he was still considered good-looking according to the beauty standards of the Upper District and had an appearance that had not yet been corrupted by the gray fog.

Red felt somewhat embarrassed being stared at by a person with such a dignified appearance.

“How strange... Why are you red?” Lin Jie asked inquisitively, “I saw that most people here are green.”

“Heh,” Red raised her head proudly. “It’s because I was born near a red crystal mine. Before I was born, my mother ate a lot of red crystal ore, so I came out red. My name is Red because of this too.”

Lin Jie nodded and continued to probe, “Where are your parents?”

Red paused for a bit, then said, “My dad died in a tunnel collapse, my mom ate too much crystal ore and died, my other three grandparents returned to the gray fog, so I live with grandma... Hey! Stop trying to get information out of me, you are a criminal!”

Returning to the gray fog—this was a synonym for death in the Lower District. Lower District denizens believed that they were born in the gray fog, inherently carrying sin, and would die in the gray fog.

All of it was the result of brainwashing by the rulers of the Upper District. To them, the livestock of the Lower District and the gray fog were equally demonic, destined to stay in that hellish underground, forever enslaved and imprisoned...

And the most frightening part was that the majority of Lower District denizens accepted this view.

Ignoring her annoyed face, Lin Jie continued to ask, “Why are you all mining here? Logically speaking, the gray fog affects you all greatly. Why not break through the surface and escape?”

Lin Jie said this as if it was a matter of fact. But after Red understood what he had just said, her round eyes immediately bulged out as she chided loudly, “Ah—! How can there be someone like you? Shut your mouth, the Witch of Trees will hear.”

Lin Jie was speechless. *The Witch of Trees has already turned into my dear friend Silver. Do you even think that she can hear us?*

Knock knock!

Hurried knocks rang out on the front tree branch of Red's dwelling. This, on top of Lin Jie's 'crazy talk' moments earlier, made Red nearly jump up in fright... Did the Witch of Trees hear it?

"Red!" A rough male voice sounded from outside.

Red walked to the entrance nervously and drew the curtain aside. There, a tall, black-robed man stood towering over her. His chin tentacles were slightly raised, making him look like an upper-class person from the Lower District.

"Your grandmother was trampled to death while collecting food. Starting this month, you'll need to provide four precious-grade ores to exchange for food." Having said that, the man didn't even bother looking at Red and walked straight to the next house.

This shack was barely even a house, and Lin Jie could clearly hear the sounds outside the door and fell into deep thought.

Red was in a state of shock at having heard something unbelievable. Before that robed man went far, she rushed on and planted herself on his thigh like a mushroom. Tears welled up in her despairing eyes as she cried out, "Sir, you must be mistaken! How could Grandma die?"

That man didn't even bother explaining and kicked Red into a mud pit. Red fell in with a splash, covered in mud, and felt a sharp pain in her ribs as if they were broken.

The man scoffed, "Your grandmother is nearly forty, and it's natural for her to die. Not many live that long, so she's already had it good."

"Moreover..." He turned to Red and derided, "Aren't you already nine? Already an adult, yet still trying to claim a child's share and having your grandmother who's already so old to do such a dangerous thing like collecting food."

"Death is normal, isn't it?"

“No, no!” Red, with her mouth full of mud, cried loudly, “Grandma said I’m still a child! Grandma told me not to grow up! Red doesn’t want to become an adult!”

The administrator ignored Red and let her cry alone in the mud. Lin Jie finally walked out of the tent and watched Red slumped on the muddy ground. He then went over to her and waited till she passed out from crying before he picked the little Lower District girl up in his arms and brought her back inside.

Chapter 448: Deeper

Chapter 448: Deeper

Lin Jie carried Red back in silence, and it wasn't until the next morning did she wake up. But every time she thought about her grandmother, Red would burst into tears.

Lin Jie was at a loss for words. He made a small stool for himself and sat outside the tent reading. There wasn't any sunlight in the Lower District, and the only street lights within these tunnels were made of luminous spinal stones that only shone for two hours per day, which were used by the administrators to find their way around.

Due to the long time spent living underground, night vision was one of the more important mutations Lower District denizens gained.

It wasn't till about five o'clock the next day that Red came out of the tent with swollen eyes and stared at Lin Jie in surprise. "Why are you still here?"

Lin Jie clapped his book shut and chuckled. "I'm your hostage, remember?"

He needed a guide to explore the Lower District as a human, and not the god that had caused all of it.

"I want to mine," Red said with a choked voice. "I haven't eaten in days."

"I'll go with you."

Red frowned as he scrutinized Lin Jie. Although this person was much weaker than Lower District denizens, he at least was a man and could still help in some way.

Red's grief for her grandmother was much more exaggerated than that of all the Lower District's denizens because death was always

present in this place.

The air here either smelled of rocks or was filled with the endless stench of corpses. Behind where Red lived was practically a mass grave. She didn't know where her grandmother was buried, but the body was probably just thrown somewhere by the administrators.

"Come mine with me, and find my grandma," Red said, taking out a shovel and pointing it at Lin Jie.

Lin Jie nodded, adjusted his cloak, and followed behind Red.

In the Lower District, anyone over the age of eight was considered an adult. The average age here was only 25, and most were crushed by the cycle of pollution, hunger, and repetitive overwork.

For children at the age of eight, like Red, having to hand in three precious-grade ore every day was rather distressing. After turning nine, girls needed to hand in four pieces, while boys needed to submit six. Upon turning 15, this number only doubled.

Lin Jie and Red walked along the tunnels, where he casually used his ability of 'Enchanted Heart Alteration' to easily assimilate with the people around him.

Red intended to get more ore but was squeezed out by others. She looked like a little frog with her cheeks puffed up and her tentacles flailing angrily as she tried pushing her way back in, but Lin Jie picked her up.

"Don't do such a foolish thing unless you want to die the same way as your grandmother did," Lin Jie said with a smile.

At the mention of her grandmother, Red pursed her lips as tears welled up in her eyes. "Why are you so indifferent? You're so bad," Red bemoaned bitterly.

Hearing this, Lin Jie raised an eyebrow and let go of Red's hand. The young girl fell to the ground as Lin Jie watched her silently before saying, "That's true, I'm much more indifferent than before.

"Maybe it's because I can easily resurrect your grandmother, and I

also know what sort of world people go to after they die.” Lin Jie muttered to himself, “So it’s like that, sigh...”

“You can resurrect Grandma? ...If you joke about Grandma one more time, I’ll kill you!” Red knew that it was impossible for the dead to come back to life and raised her shovel at Lin Jie, her eyes glistening with tears.

Lin Jie raised his hands out of habit to indicate he meant no harm, then said, “I heard someone say today that there are lots of ores deeper underground. We can mine there.”

Red’s face paled when she heard this. “We are now on the sixth level, and there’s indeed more ores underground. But Grandma said that the deeper you go, the pollution is more severe and many monsters hibernate there.”

“That may be so, but I’ve seen the administrators give these so-called ‘monsters’ food while they give ores to the administrators in return.” Lin Jie rubbed his chin and egged Red on. “So, they are able to communicate. If they eat people, those administrators would be the first to be eaten.”

“The reason they don’t eat people is because of the Witch!” Red corrected, “The Witch of Trees will punish them if they kill the sacred administrators.”

Lin Jie mused for a bit. The Witch of Trees, who had long been in deep slumber and cared about nothing, had actually been silently ruling the entire underground with her majestic authority. They had been using so-called ‘religion’ to control everyone here.

Lin Jie glanced at the adults mining around him, and his gaze fell on a few that were bunched up and whispering to each other.

Even if that was the case, there were still a large number of dissidents, and the Church of Pestilence had probably been born from this.

“Then, if you also believe in the Witch of Trees, those monsters won’t kill you,” Lin Jie continued. “Or, do you not believe in the

Witch of Trees?”

“You are speaking nonsense!” Red hurriedly refuted. Lin Jie’s simple provocation was way too easy when used on a kid like Red who was barely nine.

He followed Red through the maze of tunnels and continued downward. The rock stratum around them gradually became softer, and there was a greater danger of spontaneous tunnel collapses. However, the administrators didn’t care about this. All Lower District denizens were sinners.

As for what sins they were, it was mostly something from the stuff of legends and myths. Ancestors of Lower District denizens had once been in cahoots with the evil god and had stolen and consumed the fruit from the Primordial Tree belonging to the Witch of Trees.

These claims were way too weak, but in a place like Norzin, full of transcendent beings, such matters seemed rather credible.

However, Lin Jie knew better than anyone where these people came from and why they became like this—

Even before Norzin was built, class division was already prevalent. The arrival of the wandering traveler from the vast cosmos affected Azir, and the ancient Elven Kingdom collapsed. At that time, the place of rest for the traveler possessed rich resources and treasures.

To prevent the wandering traveler from destroying her anointed, Silver locked up her world of higher magic within the dream realm.

The Witch of Life’s power was weak, yet she thought she could protect humankind, and thus she created a human camp.

That was Norzin’s initial beginnings. After the Witch of Life fell, humans no longer had protection and required more resources. Hence, the underground, where the evil god slumbered, was their foundation for survival.

Plainly put, humankind was just too weak.

At that time, ‘class division’ was also beginning to take shape. The poor, lacking in power and status, were driven from the surface and started to mine for minerals underground.

The Witch of Life desperately tried to prevent humans from going near the evil god, but humans rushed toward it without hesitation.

Mutation came quickly. The impoverished miners in the underground began to exhibit bestial features, such as the green crocodile-like skin, clawed tentacles, forked tongues, and strong limbs which they had now...

However, opposing voices were suppressed. The people in the Upper District were fortunate enough to completely separate themselves from the mutated humans in the Lower District, no longer seeing them as human beings but like livestock such as cattle and horses. They even blocked the passage between the Upper and Lower District, demanding ores in exchange for resources for survival.

Humans have always been good at this sort of thing... Lin Jie mocked inwardly, but then he glanced at the tiny Red, suddenly recalling her reproachful voice.

Lin Jie had indeed become very indifferent... He clenched his fists and told himself not to be like this.

The Upper District’s method of using force to block the passage to the Lower District wasn’t one that would remain effective. Such a thing couldn’t last for long, and lies became the best means. Via the name of the Witch of Trees, the ‘Law of Sinners’ that ruled over the wills of Lower District denizens soon spread throughout the underground.

That was also the only time the Witch of Trees’ power was used—to subjugate the people of the Lower District. And because of this suppression, the judgment of being ‘sinners’ took root in the hearts of every Lower District denizen and, at the same time, castrated their thoughts and ideas.

Lin Jie followed Red in silence, and they came before a well in a

sparsely populated area.

“From here, we can go down to the fifth layer, the fourth, the third...” Red said, over the well’s opening, but there wasn’t an echo, perhaps because the well was too deep.

However, an overwhelming stench, like the rancid odor of a monster’s mouth, wafted from the well’s opening.

Red stared at the huge well with a complicated look on her face. Even with his omniscience and omnipotence, Lin Jie felt that he couldn’t fully understand this child.

“The deeper we go, the more minerals there are, but the pollution gets worse...” Red frowned.

But... it's closer to myself... Lin Jie thought to himself.

Chapter 449: Church Of Pestilence's Purpose

The deep well completely swallowed up Red's voice as if it was a gluttonous spirit that devoured everything, including light.

There were a total of seven levels in the Lower District, and the deeper one went, the closer they were to the source of pollution. This well was one of the passages leading to the lower levels, and there were many stories of people who recklessly went down to mine for more ore and never ever returned.

It was because of how dangerous it was that few people even ventured near it. This was also one of the reasons why Lin Jie couldn't figure out Red.

Though she was too young to properly compete with adults for ore, it wasn't too difficult to get some, albeit lesser than she hoped for. Perhaps to the extent of just having enough for one meal a day, or every two days.

Can't you survive like that? It's just eating a few less meals a day... Haa, Red's totally a little fatty.

The stench from the hole leading to the lower depths made Red feel like throwing up. The darkness of the opening made it impossible to see the depth, and from afar, it looked like a black lake, enticing one to jump in and enjoy an eternal descent.

The chubby girl stared at the abyss-like well for a long time... then turned around and started running.

Lin Jie frowned, amused at her reaction. Red sprang home like a little fawn running from a predator, and Lin Jie followed after. Then, upon reaching home, she fished out a cheap-looking chain from beneath her stone bed.

"What's this?" Lin Jie asked as he tilted his head slightly to survey

the necklace.

“Have you never seen this before, even in the Upper District?” Red asked in surprise.

Lin Jie shook his head.

“Well, then it seems like this thing is indeed a treasure,” Red said, clasping the necklace carefully.

While Lin Jie had never seen this sort of necklace before, it looked really cheap no matter how he looked at it. There was a faint trace of magic attached to it, so he could tell that it was a transcendent tool that was mass-produced.

This was the sort of item people wouldn’t bother looking for if they lose it.

Red said softly, “Grandma gave it to me. She said that this thing is a treasure.”

“So, this is where your confidence comes from?” Lin Jie hesitated, then asked, “Your grandmother is a member of the Church of Pestilence, I guess?”

Red’s hand clutching the necklace suddenly tightened. The Church of Pestilence was a forbidden entity in the Lower District, but such prohibition was meaningless.

Upper District authorities were aware of the Church of Pestilence’s existence, which could be considered a byproduct of the previous revolt in the Lower District.

“Where’s the Church of Pestilence headquarters?” Lin Jie continued to ask.

Red glanced up at Lin Jie. She had been with this stranger for two days already, and her instinct told her that Lin Jie wasn’t a bad person, but a real adult.

From her impression, besides her grandmother, all others weren’t good people.

Her grandmother had said that in the Upper District, people were only considered adults at the age of twenty, and Red ought to be the same.

Because we are people from above ground too and will one day return back to where we belong... That had been what her grandmother said.

Thus, Red's grandmother always had her own stance and principles regarding Red—Red was merely a child; a child that wouldn't scheme against others and wouldn't turn bad.

Red agreed. She didn't want to grow up, she didn't want to become an adult, and she didn't want to become a member of the Church of Pestilence or any other party in the Upper District.

She was clearly just a child.

"Grandma often went to the third level." Red sniffled.

Regardless, her grandmother was already dead. It didn't matter even if her identity was exposed now.

"So you want to go to the third floor too?"

"Mhm, the Church of Pestilence's headquarters is on the third level. Grandma was very old, so the people of the Church of Pestilence would give her some food, just that recently, the church encountered some unavoidable circumstances..."

"What circumstances?" Lin Jie frowned.

"The god that the Church of Pestilence worshiped suddenly spoke. It's just a matter of time before 'He' awakens. 'He' also bestowed the church with a book called *Dream of Chaos*. Grandma didn't agree with the religious leader's interpretation of the book and thus left the church."

"Ahem..." Lin Jie quickly coughed several times when hearing this in a bid to hide his own embarrassment.

"The Church of Pestilence's dream is to leave the Lower District and

counterattack the Upper District... That was also my grandma's wish, but she didn't want to attack the Upper District, she merely wanted to return home."

Red was unbothered by Lin Jie's awkwardness and continued softly, "Even if the people in the Upper District know about the Church of Pestilence's purpose, they can't stop it because they don't dare to go deeper down."

"Even the Witch of Tree's reaches can't extend beyond the fourth level." Red slowly stood up from the ground, clasping the necklace tightly in her hand and continued with a hint of trepidation, "Because the depths of the Lower District is where that god sleeps."

Lin Jie fell silent for a bit, then asked, "So, the Church of Pestilence can be considered the leaders for the Lower District's people's revolt, right?"

Red pursed her lips and shook her head resolutely. "They aren't! They are the evil god's lackeys!"

"They believe that the changes brought by the gray fog are a gift from the evil god. They don't want to return to their homes, but instead wish to seek revenge on the people of the Upper District."

"In their eyes, everything will be destroyed once the evil god awakens, regardless of whether it is the Lower District or the Upper District. But they are not afraid, and even consider the destruction by the evil god as a gift."

"That's why I don't want to grow up and become an adult. Adults, whether in the Lower or Upper District, are bad people." Red lowered her head as beads of tears rolled down her cheeks. "The people in the Lower District have no way out."

Lin Jie gazed at Little Red and said, "So that's how it is. When that evil god is asleep, he will have all sorts of strange dreams. Those dreams are the source of the gray fog, and the closer you are to him, the more you will be assimilated, both in thought and appearance."

“And all of this was just ‘His’ unconscious actions,” Lin Jie continued. “‘He’ didn’t have any intention to hurt anyone. When ‘He’ wakes up, it will be when his will returns...”

“When ‘His’ will returns, I will die.” Red crouched down in fear, hugging her knees.

Lin Jie sighed. “Do you think I’m a bad person?”

Red didn’t know why Lin Jie asked this question all of a sudden. She cautiously gazed up at Lin Jie’s gentle smile, which reminded her of the legend about the sun that her grandmother had told her before. She sniffled and shook her head firmly.

Lin Jie didn’t know why, but he felt relieved for some reason and said, “Come on, let’s go mine some ore.”

No matter what, life still had to go on. With the dream of one day returning home, Red picked up her shovel.

Clutching the slightly jade necklace tightly, Red returned to the well that led to the lower levels. Then, along with Lin Jie, they slowly started down the stairs from the well entrance.

On the fifth level, even the two hours of street light per day couldn’t be seen. The people here had evolved stronger night vision ability, with golden vertical pupils and distorted features that almost made Red feel sick.

In theory, Red shouldn’t be able to see anything here, but it seemed like she had also evolved a stronger night vision ability.

Unfortunately, there weren’t much more mineral deposits compared to the sixth level where Red lived.

Lin Jie pointed to the well that seemed to be darker than the surrounding area and said, “Let’s continue on down for a look.”

Red tightened her grip on her enchanted necklace and nodded.

Lin Jie glanced at the cheap and ordinary item in Red’s hand and did a silent snap of his fingers, causing the necklace to emit a green

light that illuminated Red's eyes.

The Novel will be updated first on this website. Come back and continue reading tomorrow, everyone!

Chapter 450: Gods Bestowment

Chapter 450: God's Bestowment

Light had been completely abandoned in the Lower District's fifth level.

While it could be said that Red still had a few hours of light from glowing ores on the sixth floor, the fifth floor was completely devoid of light.

Lin Jie noticed that the few people he spotted here weren't endowed with superior night vision as they didn't have eyes at all. Instead, they had long forked tongues, like those of snakes that extended and retracted quickly, as if sensing the temperature and humidity around them.

Lin Jie quickly enhanced Red's night vision and changed some of her cognitive beliefs, making her think that there wasn't any difference between the sixth floor and here. He then pointed downward, indicating for them to continue descending.

Red looked around and felt slightly at ease. Everyone said that it got scarier the deeper underground it got, but now it seemed like things were still manageable.

Red gave Lin Jie a nod, and the two of them went further down under the 'gazes' of these mutated beings on the fifth level.

As a guide, Red led the way, even having an impulse to protect Lin Jie, who found it rather amusing as he followed behind her.

"Boss Lin!" Red cried out Lin Jie's name. They had exchanged names previously, but Lin Jie had it as given 'Boss Lin' on a whim.

In Red's underground world, trades or shops didn't exist, so naturally, there was no such term as 'boss.' Thus, she had really thought that Lin Jie's real name was Boss Lin.

Lin Jie had locked away most of his power and used his identity as 'Lin Jie,' an ordinary human, to perceive the Lower District.

He could hear the surprise in Red's tone and thus went down the vertical staircase to see the startled Red.

"Boss Lin! There's not a single person here!" Red said excitedly.

The paths and intricate tunnels were all empty, and not even the sound of breathing could be heard. Perhaps the pollution here was great which led to very few people being here.

Red could make a big profit here, so she excitedly picked up her shovel. "Let's dig quickly and bring the ore back up," said Red. For her, those sparkling red stones were her life source.

Lin Jie followed closely behind her.

While Red happily began digging, Lin Jie squatted to the side with his hands in his pockets.

Red got tired halfway through digging. As a young girl, bringing back a whole piece would already be impressive. After digging for some time, she leaned on her shovel and asked Lin Jie with a slight curiosity, "What's the world above like?"

Lin Jie rubbed his chin and replied, "Find a way to go up and see for yourself one day."

"Go up? How is that possible?" Red sat on the ore, hugged her knees, and pouted. "I could never go up in my whole life."

Tears fell down her face as she grumbled while picking up the shovel once more. Lin Jie listened silently to her soft sobs while watching Red's little body continue to dig for ore.

A crisp clink signified a piece of ore had been harvested, and Red's flowing tears finally ceased. However, the sound was way to clear—most of the time, a harvested ore had to be polished to reveal its shape before it could be considered up to standards. But this stone seemed to have already been polished.

Lin Jie frowned, and both he and Red heard a raspy voice, as if from some evil spirit—"Don't steal my ore..."

Red held onto the ore she had just harvested with a frightened look on her face. It was pitch dark all around, and even though Red had been bestowed strong night vision, all she saw was actually a colorless and fuzzy field of view, because there wasn't any light in this place.

Rumble—

Suddenly the rock layer underfoot moved.

A convoluted Lower District face emerged, or to be precise, it wasn't a single one but multiple faces as if from conjoined babies.

Red fell backward onto her butt and realized that the fourth level wasn't devoid of people; rather, they were everywhere, just that they were like an amalgamated mass of flesh, blood, and mud.

They—or rather, it—had become another type of organism, an amalgamated body...

Red couldn't even scream out loud and only emitted frightened gasps. Lin Jie frowned. These had been freaks obsessed with mining, and the corruption on them was so severe to the point of fusing together. They lived on eating mineral ore every day and could no longer be considered human.

They were now like a layer of flesh, spread all over the fourth level. Each face on the ground began to move, as if awakening. And the scene instantly became one that was cognitively scarring.

Red was scared witless and finally let out a shrill scream.

The monster reached out a limb, intending to drag Red along and make her a part of them.

At that moment, Lin Jie instantly released his power. Since entering the Lower District, he had been firm in not using his power so as to maintain his faith as a human being in the face of the strong corruption.

But at this moment, as he unleashed his power, Lin Jie heard countless mournful cries coming from the gray fog.

As they wrapped around Lin Jie like a fog, it was as if they were praying incessantly for Lin Jie, the son of god's return.

He was god, the son of god, as well as a divine spirit.

He glanced at that unfathomable abyss-like well. Red's home was above, while Lin Jie's place of origin was below.

Red's screams grew weaker, but her cries allowed Lin Jie to come to his senses. He grabbed Red, who had already begun to merge with the flesh, and jumped into the never-ending well.

The sensation of falling didn't last long. As Lin Jie jumped into the well, the surrounding gray fog seemed to exclaim in joy. But amid these happy cheers, Lin Jie seemed to hear a faint cry for help.

This cry for help was really familiar. Lin Jie raised his hand, caught onto the stairs that led downward as they were falling, and grabbed Red by the collar as well.

Having landed safely, he breathed a sigh of relief, but in the next moment—

“You all...”

Lin Jie and Red suddenly heard someone from behind them speak. They immediately turned around, expecting to see some sort of monsters, but in fact, it was just a few Lower District denizens, who didn't seem much different from Red.

“Did you all fall from above?” the person standing at the forefront holding a pickax asked.

Red was still in a numb daze from having been scared out of her wits by the monster from the previous floor. Lin Jie patted her head, and expression flooded back to her face as she regained her senses.

She took big gasps of air, looking terrified.

“Oh, I got it. You two must have seen the monster on the fourth level, huh?” the robed man on the third level speculated.

Lin Jie tossed Red lightly, and she landed on the ground of the third level. Lin Jie glanced into the bottom of the well once more and hopped to the ground.

Red gulped several times and nodded her head vigorously.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I just wanted to come down for some ore.” Red choked.

“Ore?” The black-cloaked man stroked his long chin tentacles and said, “Of course. We have lots of ore here. Feel free to take them.”

Red’s eyes lit up as if she had finally found relief. She plopped onto the ground, overjoyed, and exclaimed, “Boss Lin, did you hear that? We’ve finally succeeded and will have ore soon!”

Lin Jie ignored Red and instead crossed his arms. He had already used ‘Enchanted Heart Alteration’ to rewrite everyone’s perception to make them think he was one of them, with the same chin tentacles and scaly skin from their perspective.

“Strange,” Lin Jie rubbed his chin, feeling a little puzzled. “Clearly the pollution gets worse the lower underground we get, yet you guys on the third level aren’t that much different from those on the sixth and seventh levels.”

“Are you immune to it?” Lin Jie asked. ... *And isn’t the third level the Church of Pestilence’s turf?*

“Humph.” The black-robed man mocked, “Ignorant upper floor people, you call the gray fog pollution?”

As if it was a matter of fact, he continued, “That is the gift the god bestowed upon us!”

With that, he took out a book from his bag, with the title, ***Dream of Chaos*** written on it, identical to the books that appeared at the Village of Dark Night.

Chapter 451: Problem Of Hunger Solved

Chapter 451: Problem of Hunger Solved

“That is the gift the god bestowed upon us!” the man clad in black, clutching *Dream of Chaos* in his hands, said to Lin Jie.

The gray fog’s corruption and mutation had already started to exceed human limits beginning at the fourth level. The only levels that could be safely mined were the sixth level, where Red resided, and the fifth level.

The mutations on the fourth level only affected the appearance of those beings, while the cognition and thoughts were completely changed on the third level.

Simply put, people on the third floor no longer thought of themselves as human.

Red frowned hearing this man speak about it being a bestowment... She hadn’t been affected by the gray fog’s corruption too much as she was being protected by Lin Jie.

She didn’t think that these mutations were a gift from God. She believed herself human—humans should look human, or at least, like Lin Jie.

As for her own ghastly state, the gray fog was definitely responsible.

“Um, hello, sir, can we mine some ore here and leave?” Red looked toward the man with her sparkling round eyes and put her hands together.

“Of course,” the robed man smiled.

Red nearly wanted to jump up and down from excitement as she grabbed Lin Jie’s hand and shook his hand delightedly.

“These ores are a gift from our god, one of the blessings bestowed upon those who worship Him,” the robed man continued. “If you want these ores, the prerequisite is to join the Church of Pestilence and preach about our god’s grace.”

The following words of this ‘preacher’ made Red’s smile freeze.

“I...”

Lin Jie abruptly let go of Red’s hand and looked toward the tunnel heading further into the third level; glittering ores were embedded everywhere.

Moreover, even though the beings here wore black robes too, they were quite unlike the people on the sixth and fifth levels. They were more muscular, had eyes that were more animalistic, as well as possessing transcendent powers.

This group of transcendent beings was just like an army.

Lin Jie then turned his gaze toward the dark well, where he would truly return to his own body if he descended further.

His body was just an unconscious flesh body, and only he himself was the true will. So, why had these people been corrupted by an unconscious entity?

Just as Lin Jie exerted a bit of power and began to sense his unconscious body, the familiar cry for help rang out in his head once more.

...*Doris*? Lin Jie frowned. However, he was certain he had heard that familiar voice here. To be precise, it was a cry for help from the past.

Lin Jie’s eyes narrowed as if he had understood something. That elf that wanted to meet him had apparently called for his help in this place previously.

“Young lady, have you thought about it?” The man’s smile didn’t let up, though he did have a sinister look on his face now. Those black tentacles on his chin wriggled with a vibrant power.

“Um... How do I join the Church of Pestilence?” Red asked hesitantly.

“Previously, all you needed to do was swear an oath to the abyss that leads to God. But now according according to His divine guidance, you just have to swear while touching this book and read it carefully.”

Red glanced at the book and swallowed nervously.

This bizarre book was just a mishmash of dreams that Lin Jie had as an unconscious body, but in the eyes of ordinary people, it actually possessed extremely high levels of spiritual corruption. The book's black cover seemed to connect to the abyss, like an endless vortex that devoured all human reason.

“N-no... No thanks,” Red hurriedly raised her hands to decline, then said to Lin Jie, “Boss Lin, let's go back up, quickly. We don't want the ore anymore.”

A look of disbelief appeared on the man's face, and his attitude changed slightly. “Ignorant upper level people, this is voluntary for you. But without divine protection, you will have no means to pass through the fourth level ever again.”

Red got frightened and clutched Lin Jie's clothes tightly. However, Lin Jie simply wasn't listening to this fella's rambling.

“Let me ask something. Have you people captured an elf clan?” Lin Jie asked abruptly, his voice full of certainty as if he wasn't asking a question but passing judgment. His voice was loud, and other members of the Church of Pestilence that were passing by looked at him in surprise.

“Do I need to ask again?” Lin Jie asked.

“...What nonsense are you spouting?”

“Swear to the so-called abyss of yours then.” Lin Jie pointed to the black well indifferently, his cold eyes seemingly as dark as it.

Lin Jie's manner of questioning immediately attracted the attention

of quite a number of Church of Pestilence members, and they surrounded him rather quickly.

Red became anxious and tugged hard on Lin Jie's clothes to bring him back to reality.

Lin Jie subconsciously looked down at her. Fear and apprehension filled this little girl's eyes, and from Lin Jie's impression, this child had never stopped worrying for a single moment. As a child of not even nine, she was really too pitiful.

Poor thing... When this term appeared in Lin Jie's mind, he seemed to regain his humanity. He grabbed Red's hand and said, "Sorry, let's leave."

Red nodded her head.

The surrounding people didn't stop him and merely took away the book, ***Dream of Chaos***. The monster on the fourth level would attack them, and they would surely become a part of that monster.

"Are you scared, Boss Lin?" Red whispered.

Lin Jie was rather surprised and answered, "I'm alright."

"Don't be afraid. Use this to deal with that monster." Red revealed the jade necklace in her hand and showed it to Boss Lin.

It was a pity that this cheap necklace was rather poorly made.

Still, Lin Jie nodded, as if Red's encouragement had helped him overcome his fear.

The Church of Pestilence members watched on coldly as Red slowly climbed up the stairs, with Lin Jie following closely behind.

Red gritted her teeth, clutching the necklace in hand, and made it up to the fourth level after a while.

The ground of the fourth level started to move, like a carpet made of a fusion of the flesh of all the beings here.

At the moment when Red approached the monster, Lin Jie released his power, immediately restraining the monster while at the same time making the necklace emit a brighter light.

Red crawled out of the well, gasping for breath as if she had just survived a near-death experience. She fell onto the ground ungracefully, sprawling out her chubby body as her small chest heaved up and down.

It was then that Lin Jie slowly climbed out of the well.

“Thank goodness, thank goodness,” Red said, holding back her breath. “At least we’re alive and back. Compared to down below, I think the air on our sixth level is so much better.”

Lin Jie looked at her on the ground.

Gurgle—

A loud jarring rumble, like a car horn, sounded.

This was the first time Lin Jie had heard someone’s stomach make such a long and loud noise.

“Though we’ve been underground all day, we still haven’t solved the problem of ore,” Lin Jie said, tilting his head slightly. While he said it regrettably, he didn’t show any sadness as if he were stating a fact. “Without solving the problem of ore, we can’t solve the problem of hunger.”

“Who says!” Red sat up, showing off the stone in her hand. “Look! This stone was taken from the body of that flesh monster on the fourth level. Although it’s a bit disgusting, this is a rare ore on the sixth level and it’s worth a lot of food.” Red let out a toothy grin.

Chapter 452: Dreams

There were many children like Red in the Lower District, and just by looking at their faces, it could roughly be guessed that they were probably born in Tunnel 32.

There was large amounts of red ore in that tunnel, which was one of the cheapest resources in the whole Lower District. Such ores were easy to mine, with little use, and the only function being for ‘temporary consumption.’

It was termed ‘temporary consumption’ because it wouldn’t cause death immediately after consuming it. After all, ore was something that wouldn’t simply be digested in the stomach and might even grind the stomach and intestines to pieces.

Red ore, however, was different. It dissolved into powder upon coming into contact with stomach acid. This powder accumulated in the stomach and intestines, allowing the person consuming it to fill full, but over time, it became indigestible and eventually led to death.

Long-term consumption of red ore would turn one’s offspring red, and that was how Red got her name.

When Red brought the ore from the fourth level that glowed with a blue water-like light to the designated exchange point, it surprised everyone there. Such blue ores had long disappeared from the fifth, sixth, and seventh floors, and the energy from such a piece of ore could power a car for its entire lifetime.

However, Red was subjected to a barrage of queries because of this. Her instincts told her that she absolutely couldn’t say that the necklace had protected her, and thus Red insisted that she had found it herself.

To her surprise, these people actually believed her, or at least they pretended to.

“Luckily, I’m rather clever,” said Red as she carried her week’s worth of rations back to her tent. “Those greedy people would definitely have taken my necklace otherwise.”

Lin Jie nodded in earnest as if he were treating Red as an adult. “Indeed, there’s a rule in the Lower District that says private possessions aren’t permitted.”

“Mm, not bad, not bad. Little Lin remembers well and should deserve praise,” Red nodded like she was all grown up. Now, she would often unintentionally mimic her grandmother’s tone, treating Lin Jie like a child.

Lin Jie eyed the food in her hand which that rare-grade gem ore had been exchanged for. Although it was only a week’s worth, and it seemed that Red had been taken advantage of, she still happily cooked up a pot of food.

“Uwah! It smells so good!”

Soft, fragrant flour had been cooked into a paste and burnt in several places, but it was still the most delicious and only food in the Lower District.

“Here, this is yours.” Red filled two bowls with gruel and handed one to Lin Jie. “You can use Grandma’s bowl.”

Lin Jie received the bowl, which was chipped, and took a mouthful of the gruel that Red had made. Besides the charred taste, there was a strong smell of mold. It was all moldy food that had been thrown away by the Upper District.

Given the dietary and living conditions here, it was no wonder someone being able to live past the age of thirty was considered miraculous.

Red lowered her head and ate with great enthusiasm, drooling during the entire process.

While Red was chubby, her appetite wasn’t that huge, but still, that bit of food she had gotten definitely wouldn’t last Lin Jie and her for a week. Therefore, the most urgent matter was to continue

searching for more ore.

After three days of relentless effort, Red finally found a piece of ore that belonged to no one and was a precious ore that could be exchanged for a week's worth of rations.

Mining was both a physical and mental torment. At night, Red had to sleep next to the ore vein in case someone else took it. Moreover, she also had to take care not to be bullied and have the ore stolen away.

"Those adults are all bullies," Red said to Lin Jie as she carefully chiseled away at the rock.

Lin Jie was casually seated at the side, watching Red.

Red continued to mutter, "That's why I don't want to become an adult. Grandma says that people become bad when they grow up... Hey! Are you even listening to me?!"

"I am," replied Lin Jie nonchalantly. Red was pacified and continued, "Grandma also said that humans must have dreams. And that's the greatest difference between humans and animals."

"Oh right, do you have a dream?" Red suddenly halted work and asked. Her black and red eyes were filled with anticipation as well as reason and clarity, completely unlike the pupils of others who had been mutated.

"Um, I guess so?" Lin Jie pondered for a moment and answered.

"What is it?" Red asked excitedly.

"Probably to become the owner of a bookstore, live an ordinary life, and be able to help provide some guidance to the lives of others."

"What's a... owner of a bookstore?" Red fell into deep thought after hearing about this dream.

"You'll know when you get up there."

Lin Jie's casual remark got Red really excited. "Right, right. You also think I can go up there, don't you?"

Lin Jie nodded.

"Tell me more about what it's like up there. It's my long lost home and also where my ancestors once lived." Red's light voice sounded cheerful and lively, like a distant song blooming into a flower in this dull tunnel.

Lin Jie was slightly moved and took a deep breath before he began to describe in earnest about what was 'up there.'

An ore emitting faint light was in Red's hand. Although its quality wasn't very good, it still barely made the requirements.

Red wiped off the dirt on her face weakly. She had a naturally larger build than most, and now, even her clothes seemed shrunk on her. Her round face had slimmed down, and her eyes had gotten larger.

It had been about a week since she had last eaten, but Red couldn't keep track of time. Most within the Lower District couldn't do so either.

"This stone can be exchanged for three days' worth of food," Red held the ore and placed it parallel to her face, the color of it reflected in her eyes, which was a pretty sight to behold.

Lin Jie glanced at the stone in Red's hand, then at the sketchy administrators beside them. These fellas were like Red and the others, denizens of the polluted Lower District that had never been to the Upper District in their whole lives.

But now they were the minions of the Upper District, relying on the power and influence from above, and were called 'administrators.'

Because of the watchful surveillance of these people, Lin Jie had a vague feeling that they probably didn't believe Red's claim on how she had found the blue gem. They were constantly watching her,

waiting for her to go on another adventure to the lower levels so that they could find out how she managed to come back alive from the fourth level.

Lin Jie had a frown as he observed those people. They seemed rather disappointed to see that Red refused to go deeper down to mine for ore even though she was practically starving.

“Let’s go exchange this for food,” Red said feebly, still managing to eke out a smile.

“Alright, I’ll cook this time. I can make dishes from the Upper District,” Lin Jie suddenly said ‘generously.’

They had been living together for over a month, and he had always been like a spoiled young master who never ever lifted a finger to do anything.

“That’s great!” Red swelled up in excitement like a balloon inflating. “Fantastic, my dream is going to be half realized!”

Red happily ran to the designated point for exchange. Lin Jie followed behind, while still keeping on the bunch of administrators that had been following Red. After expressing some disappointment amongst themselves, they eventually ended the monitoring of Red.

Using ‘Enchanted Heart Alteration,’ Lin Jie changed his own image in the minds of others to that of a burly, twenty-year-old male. A strong, healthy male at this age would stand atop the power hierarchy in the entire Lower District. As such, with Lin Jie standing by her side, Red didn’t get duped of a proper share and received a whole week’s worth of food.

“I got a week’s worth of food for just this one piece of ore. Last time, they only gave me a week’s worth for that blue gem. They are really bad people!” a pouting Red grumbled.

Lin Jie followed behind without offering any words of comfort. His words were now scarce, and he only spoke when discussing dreams with Red.

As they walked to Tunnel 32, they saw a crowd gathered in front of

the tents where people stayed.

Chapter 453: Return Home

Lin Jie had stayed in the Lower District for close to a month and the people here could be considered acquaintances that nodded when they saw him. Unfortunately, Lin Jie would always use ‘Enchanted Heart Alteration’ to modify the image of him in their minds, so these people didn’t really have much of an impression of him.

The area with old and run-down tents was crowded with people, and this was the first time Lin Jie saw such a sight. Normally, everyone in the Lower District was busy and worked close to 24 hours a day, from dawn to dusk.

Red had a vague sense of foreboding and hurried forward. She had just reached the crowd when someone shouted, “She’s here!”

Red instinctively stopped in her tracks, hiding the bag of moldy flour behind her back as her breathing became slightly rapid.

Many pairs of eyes focused on Red, and the crowd slowly split and opened a path for her, revealing several tall administrators standing in front of the small tent where she and Lin Jie lived.

The pile of trash in the lodging had basically been strewn all over the ground, and one side of the tent was torn apart.

The main administrator was one that had been following Red before. In his hand was a chain leashed to two large but skinny black dogs that barred their sharp fangs. These animals seemed to have been corrupted by the gray fog too, and long strings of putrid transparent saliva dripped from their jaws.

Red couldn’t help but back away.

The administrator had a crazed look in his feral golden pupils and green face. When he saw the fearful expression on Little Red’s face, he revealed a sinister smile. The greasy tentacles on his chin twitched, and one could see yellow rotting vegetable residues between his teeth.

“Red, was it?” the administrator asked hoarsely.

“Yes... May I ask if you need anything?” Red lowered her head and asked meekly.

“You even know how to ask politely. Looks like your grandmother taught you well,” said the administrator with an evil grin as he raised his hand, revealing a necklace hanging around his finger.

Red’s pupils shrank when she saw the necklace, and she gulped anxiously several times.

“Then, your grandmother must have forgotten to teach you not to steal.”

“No, no!” Red trembled violently like a little timid rabbit. She raised her hand and waved it forcibly. “It wasn’t stolen, Grandma and I picked it up while mining previously.”

“Ha?” The manager feigned a look of incredulity. “Don’t you know that hoarding personal possessions is prohibited here in the Lower District?”

“Growl...” The two black dogs whined and eyed Red greedily.

“I...” Red’s mouth opened, but she couldn’t say anything.

The two dogs barked at her loudly, itching to pounce on Red, causing Red to nearly fall to the ground.

“You ought to remember what the punishment for theft and hoarding of personal possessions is, right?” chuckled the administrator as he released the chain in his hand.

Red’s eyes were bulging, and in the next moment, she grabbed Lin Jie’s hand with a sudden burst of inexplicable strength.

“Run!!!”

She hadn’t eaten for several days, but she shouted very loudly as she grabbed Lin Jie’s hand and started to run.

The two ferocious dogs sprang after them swiftly, their long tongues flapping around while their skinny bodies almost straightened into a line.

It seemed that due to the gray fog's corruption, the physique of people within the Lower District was much stronger than those of the Upper District. Red held onto Lin Jie's hand firmly and pulled away from the two dogs.

Lin Jie hadn't even been able to take a breath as he was pulled along and followed Red's lead, his steps steady and unchanged.

The administrator stood there and laughed loudly before he fished out a communicator and said something into it.

"I don't want to die..." Red sobbed quietly as she ran.

"Let go of me. You'll be able to run much faster," said Lin Jie from behind her.

"You're an idiot! You won't be able to run far without me," Red shouted back.

"Didn't you initially want to use me as a hostage?" asked Lin Jie calmly. "Don't you want revenge against the Upper District?"

Red pursed her lips, tears welling up in her eyes and blurring her vision. However, she had traversed this tunnel hundreds of times and could even shuttle through it with her eyes closed.

Perhaps this place is my home... I have no rights to go up to the surface.

The person whose hand she held had been so lucky to be able to live in the Upper District. Just by holding on to him, Red felt like her dreams were within reach.

"You're my friend now," Red muttered softly, but Lin Jie had keen hearing and could clearly hear her. "You're my friend... You're my first friend. Friends are important, and... and, humph, I was hoping to use you to go to the Upper District..."

She gazed up. "One day, you can bring me back to my home."

Home...

Lin Jie's mind, frozen in the gray fog, gradually shattered, and countless memories of people and events became clear. The surging emotions pulsed through his veins as his petrified heart cracked open.

"But my home isn't here," Lin Jie gradually regained his voice. In his mind, memories of his brief time on Earth and in Norzin were fighting with his memories as a wandering star of many eons. "Perhaps my home is at the very bottom. That's where I was born."

It had all been clearly written in that notebook. He had devoured the entire archaeological team, eaten his mother, and was finally brought to Earth by his seriously hurt father.

Because he came into being, a lot of people were ruined.

If Lin Jie were to accept his 'identity' of being human, would he have to take responsibility for all those people?

"That's not it!" Red turned her head. She didn't know why Lin Jie suddenly said that the lowest level was his home, but Lin Jie definitely didn't belong there.

In the past month being together with Lin Jie, although the guy was like a stone, always indifferent and unconcerned, he still supported her absurd dream.

He comforted her when her grandmother died, and he helped her on the fourth and third levels.

These were things that simply didn't exist in the Lower District. Here, there wasn't any family, friendship, or love... Just cold hard tools.

But Lin Jie had these, and for Red, these were the most precious things.

"That's not your home. Your home is the same place as mine, you're

you, you're Boss Lin..." Red grinned, tears still hanging on her face.

"I really want to go back to my hometown..." Red sobbed. "Can I go to Boss Lin's bookstore? I'm strong, I can help you mine—"

A raspy voice from various loudspeakers throughout the tunnel nearly pierced their eardrums. "Red from Tunnel 32, in violation of level one regulations, is currently on the run. The person who catches her will be rewarded with three precious-grade ore."

The broadcast played the message and Red's eyes widened when she heard it. She slowed down as workers all around her stopped mining and looked at her, as if trying to ascertain if it was her.

Before Lin Jie could react, a giant shovel suddenly smashed into Red's back.

Red screamed in agony.

"You're Red, right?" The shovel belonged to an old man with grizzled white hair. "I don't care if you are or not. But anyone that's red has to die."

Red fell to the ground from the impact, and the barking dogs pounced on her. The man's actions made everyone rush toward Red and they violently pushed Lin Jie aside.

Chapter 454: I'll Send You All Home

Red had let go of Lin Jie who was pushed away by someone. And before the two hunting dogs arrived, Red was struck by a shovel on the back of her head.

...Just for three pieces of ore, these people turned on their own kind in an instant.

Red felt a sharp pain at the back of her head, losing consciousness as she fell forward. However, the terrifying part was still to come. The two hunting dogs rushed over, biting her neck and injecting venom into the girl's neck.

She fell to the ground, silently, in pain and helpless. Warm blood spurted out from her open mouth, like bright plum blossoms.

Lin Jie slowly got up from the ground and watched Red's life gradually slipping away. Life... which he had once viewed as shallow.

He thoroughly released the power within him, and the ground began to tremble as a powerful wave spread underground.

"Whine..." The two ferocious dogs, with keen animal instincts far more sensitive than humans, immediately let go of Red's neck and whimpered fearfully.

While his power continued to be released endlessly, resonating voices from the gray fog echoed in Lin Jie's ears once more as if celebrating his awakening with song. At the same time, the gray fog was also eroding the dwindling human will that remained in Lin Jie.

However, at this moment, Lin Jie's gaze was only on Red, the short young girl that had already passed on. That fragile body carried the strongest soul Lin Jie had ever seen.

And as Lin Jie accepted that power once more, a light emanated from the god's body in the deepest depths of the Lower District, like a heart that was starting to beat.

The leader of the Church of Pestilence stared at the dark abyss, his eyes revealing both awe and fright.

“God! Is about to be resurrected!” He raised his hands high and yelled.

When that god reemerges, ‘He’ would destroy everything. That was the Church of Pestilence’s doctrine.

And now, death would soon come to everyone.

He saw thick paste-like substances, most probably flesh and blood, slowly flow out from the fourth level above, which was probably a sign that the mutated monster there had been completely corrupted by the gray fog. And on the third level, what the gray fog did was devour all their spirit.

“It’s time!”

Because of the book, Dream of Chaos, which had been given by Lin Jie, the Church of Pestilence had undergone a massive purge that resulted in not many people left within their congregation.

The Church of Pestilence’s religious leader took out a communications device that only high-level administrators of the Lower District possessed and contacted a mole within the Upper District that would be helping them return to the Upper District.

“God is about to awaken. All our plans are ruined!” the religious leader shouted into the communications device hoarsely. “It’s too early, ‘He’s’ waking up too early from his slumber!”

Naturally, their plan had been to return to the Upper District and kill everyone there that had enslaved them Lower District denizens. And it was the will of the god that everything would be destroyed upon ‘His’ awakening, which made them even more intent on

revenge.

Of course, how would sane people continue to believe in a god that would ultimately destroy everything? Even if they believed in ‘Him,’ they would still have to face death at this time.

“Never mind, we will conquer the Upper District today!” roared the Church of Pestilence’s religious leader as the tentacles on his chin squirmed in a frenzy.

All members of the Iris Clan near the Village of Dark Night had been captured, and now only a blood sacrifice of them was needed to sound the horn of destruction that would signal the attack on the Upper District.

After the religious leader finished speaking, the Iris Clan elves that had been imprisoned were dragged out by other church members. Regardless of whether they were young or old, all of them had been cruelly abused and badly hurt.

Sixth Level.

With some difficulty, Lin Jie got up from the ground and slowly made his way to Red. The two vicious hounds fled with their tails between their legs upon sensing the ridiculously strong power. However, after scampering a few steps away, they burst open from the inside within the gray fog.

People, on the other hand, were much worse at sensing danger than animals. The people around Red only saw the departure of the dogs and heard the howls of agony that followed, causing them to feel a vague sense of unease. However, they didn’t know where this unease came from until Lin Jie walked up to them.

A chill ran up their spines as Lin Jie slowly drew back his hood, released ‘Enchanted Heart Alteration,’ and revealed a face that only existed in the Upper District.

There was no expression on that face which was always kind and smiling, only a pair of cold dark eyes that were like an endless

abyss.

An inexplicable fear gripped their minds the moment they saw Lin Jie, causing them to scream and flee frantically, only to find out that the tunnel was filled with the gray fog, blocking all paths of exit.

The gray fog was a symbol of the god in the underground. It could even be said to be the extension of the god's limbs that was slumbering in the underground palace. Like spirits, they floated in the air and were the source of all pollution and corruption.

The man that had knocked Red unconscious with the shovel had since lost his mind, clutching his ugly face as he collapsed on the ground screaming and backing away.

"...Why did you kill her?" Lin Jie asked.

The man's legs were shaking violently from fear. The power emanating from this person seemed to call out to his body, causing every one of his muscles to come alive and inflict pain as if his body was about to be torn apart.

"I... I wanted food... Ore can be traded for... food," the man uttered with great difficulty, then got on his knees and started bashing his forehead on the ground repeatedly. Those others around him immediately imitated his actions, smashing their foreheads on the ground till blood flowed.

"Without food... we'll starve... and be taken to the lower mines to be slaves... I didn't want that! I really didn't want that! The Church of Pestilence said that if we offer ores to God, God will bless us... and grant us food..."

Lin Jie remained expressionless.

God? God definitely isn't here.

Lin Jie squatted down and gently picked up the small body of Red. Her now dull red eyes were completely lifeless, and she still clutched the bag of moldy flour in her hand.

She was completely devoid of life, but death would not be the end.

Hurried footsteps echoed through the winding tunnels as Lin Jie fully embraced and resonated with the underground power, emitting a never-ending gray fog that alarmed the top brass of the Lower District.

Because of the massive battle of 67th Avenue, the path controlled by Rolle Resources and the Truth Union was sealed. Thus, those high-ranking authority wielders that had acted tough and intimidating to their fellow people panicked at being abandoned by the Upper District and thus turned to cooperate with the Church of Pestilence in the Lower District. They wanted to use the dark elves of the Village of Dark Night to return back up from the Lower District.

Yet now, such a great commotion had been caused by the execution of an inconsequential girl.

“Who are you?” Several high-ranking administrators asked the same question upon seeing Lin Jie holding the girl.

“The one who will send you home.” Lin Jie revealed the same gentle smile as before, then continued, “But it’s your ancestral home.”

The spreading gray mist was like a massive claw, and under Lin Jie’s silent smile, these high-ranking administrators were torn to bits by monstrous gray fog that swept through and devoured them.

Driving the Iris Clan’s elves forward, Church of Pestilence members raised their crosses high and walked through the stunned people of the Lower District, continuously calling out for the counteroffensive on the Upper District.

Then, as they turned a corner, they encountered the high-ranking administrators who were being ripped about, and they froze for a moment.

And causing it all was the man who was holding a red girl in his arms.

The religious leader immediately recognized Lin Jie at first glance. It was a feeling, based solely on the abstract image of God in the book, *Dream of Chaos*, that made him recognize Lin Jie right away.

“You...” The religious leader’s mouth gaped open, fear and disbelief making him only able to utter this one word.

Lin Jie turned his head, seeing the abused elves as well as the Church of Pestilence congregation that resembled feral beasts.

“Boss Lin!” an elf in chains suddenly shouted. “Lady Doris’ words were true. You’ve come to save us, right?”

“I see.” Lin Jie tilted his head in thought for a moment, then nodded. “Silver seemed to have mentioned the feud between the Village of Dark Night and the Iris Clan before... Seems that those dark elves want to take everything back.”

Lin Jie waved his hand, and with a clink, the chains binding the elves snapped.

The Church of Pestilence’s leader, upon seeing the released elves, felt his faith waver amid the confusion and chaos—God had arrived and would destroy everything. Including himself.

God didn’t stand on his side... Then... the plan to destroy the Upper District was over. Now, everyone must die!

He raised a hand and said to Lin Jie, “I believe in you.”

Then he put his hand on his chest, and with five fingers exerting force, ripped out his own heart and presented it for Lin Jie to admire before crashing straight to the ground.

Lin Jie frowned and took a step back because of the blood on the ground.

“Madman...”

The lump of flesh underground... Referring to his own body in such a way didn’t seem appropriate, but in any case, his original body had already corroded and devoured the wills of those on the third

level.

Seeing their leader's actions, the remaining congregation members exchanged glances and prepared to present their own hearts as well as forcibly demand others to pledge their loyalty by doing the same.

Lin Jie hadn't come here to watch such a performance and instantly controlled the thoughts of everyone.

Chapter 455: There Once Was A Boss Lin

The bloody heart of the Church of Pestilence's leader fell to the ground. All the other blind followers were about to follow suit and kill themselves, but Lin Jie sighed and took control of their thoughts.

"Where is Doris?" Lin Jie didn't bother with these cultists and instead asked the elves that had been released.

One elderly elf answered, "The door between the dream realm and the real world has been opened. Miss Doris has gone to see Lady Silver and you, Boss Lin."

Lin Jie nodded. Doris had indeed said that she would come to see him. But looking at the current state of things... She had probably just missed him.

"You all should leave," Lin Jie said. The elves hesitated to speak and ultimately kneeled to pay respects to Lin Jie before helping each other and heading along the path toward the Upper District.

At this time, many more miners attracted by the commotion had begun to appear in the tunnel, observing Lin Jie fearfully from the shadows.

The Church of Pestilence was an existence that couldn't be ignored in the underground. Even the Upper District accepted their presence, and thus many people here had heard of the Church of Pestilence's teachings.

When the god beneath the ground awakens, everything in the human world will be destroyed.

And having been heavily contaminated by the evil god, their connection with Lin Jie was even greater, and they had a sense of natural closeness and reverence for him.

Lin Jie lifted his hand and gently brushed aside Red's hair that was caked with blood. Invisible power gathered, healing her wounds and restoring life into her.

Even though the power of life and death were within Lin Jie's control and he was practically omnipotent, all of this power was like a monster that wrapped around Lin Jie and would change him.

Color returned to the girl's face and she coughed violently. Tears flowed freely from her tightly shut eyes, perhaps because they had been denied by her death. Then Red's eyes opened slowly, and Lin Jie's calm face came into view.

"...B-Boss, Lin?" Red said weakly.

From her memory, ever since the first time she had met Lin Jie, Lin Jie had always been expressionless as if the end of the world was upon them, or as if he had seen through it all, and was always observing everything with indifference.

But now, Lin Jie's gaze was gentle and concerned, like the way Red's own grandmother would look at her when she was sick, though it was not quite the same.

However, Lin Jie's arm tightly supporting her neck was no different from the warm, loving hands of her grandmother in her memories. The same gentle stroking of her forehead when she was delirious as if those hands full of love could cure all maladies.

At that moment, Red's warmest memories became that of both Lin Jie and her grandmother.

"Am I dead, Boss Lin?" Red asked hoarsely.

Lin Jie's slightly furrowed brows eased and he smiled. "No, I resurrected you."

"...So you can really bring people back to life, haa..." Red managed to force a weak smile.

"It's because I'm a god," said Lin Jie in full seriousness.

Red was taken aback for a moment, then shook her head. “You’re just like Grandma, someone who loves me and treats me like a child.”

“From now on, you are no longer a child,” Lin Jie said gently, helping her up as the girl’s stiff limbs nearly caused her to stumble.

Red looked at the crowd surrounding them, then staggered forward and stared at everyone in a daze.

Lin Jie caught hold of Red’s hand and brought her before the Church of Pestilence’s members. “Your leader is dead. From now on, Red will be the new leader of the Church of Pestilence.”

Just as the Ash Chamber of Commerce was going to compete with the Rolle Resources, once the Upper and Lower Districts were connected, the Church of the Pestilence would have to coexist with the Sun’s Faith. Otherwise, the Sun’s Faith might one day become the next Church of the Dome.

Everyone exchanged looks of disbelief. The one lying on the ground was their leader, but before them was the true god.

“I...” Red opened her mouth, wanting to say something.

Lin Jie didn’t wait for anyone to react, nor did he let Red speak as he pulled her along and headed to the well which they had used to head further underground. Now, the well opening was filled with gray fog.

Lin Jie turned to Red and said, “Even children will grow up some day and not all adults are bad people. It’s also because there are so many bad adults so Red wants to become a good adult and help others become good.”

Red stared wide-eyed at the smiling Lin Jie.

“People will always grow up. This is something inevitable, just like how I must return home.”

“Does Boss Lin not want to return home?” Red realized something was off with Lin Jie and tugged his hand urgently.

Lin Jie smiled and answered truthfully, "I don't want to, even though I've spent much more time 'there' than 'here'... But the word 'home' really matters to a person's identity."

Earth to Norzin, just a short 30 years of human life... It's really a drop in the ocean, compared to endless time... Lin Jie mused as he stared at the well opening filled with gray fog. "You have made me understand a lot, such as the dreams of humans like you have."

Thinking that he probably wouldn't ever return, Lin Jie told Red everything about himself, including the fact that if he returned to that god body, he wouldn't be Lin Jie anymore.

"I am that god. I killed my parents in the other world, their friends... Because of my books and my blind instincts, I caused the sacrifice of countless. Because of the existence of my original body, the whole Lower District was contaminated.

"I don't like this, but these are all facts," sighed Lin Jie. "If I accept this my identity as a god, how should I bear the mistakes I have made?"

"All of this causes my human self-reproach to press tightly on me, but they become another voice in my heart that tells me that I am a god; that I don't have to sympathize with anyone, that I can control life and death, that I can manipulate everything, and that I can have whatever I want...

"These voices helped me step out of my self-reproach, but they also gradually made me drift away from the self that I liked."

As Lin Jie spoke, he smiled bitterly, then squatted down to pat Red's head. "I'm sorry for telling you all this and not treating you as a child."

"...I'm no longer a child anymore, Boss Lin. You said so," Red suddenly interrupted, hands on hips. "But regardless of if I'm a child or not, I know one thing."

Red lifted her hands to hold Lin Jie's face, pressed her forehead against his, and gently closed her eyes. "Because I know—

“Boss Lin is a savior.”

Lin Jie’s dark abyss-like eyes suddenly lit up.

“You are the savior from the books that I’ve heard about. It’s because of your sacrifice that I have the opportunity to realize my dream,” Red said as tears streamed down her cheeks once again. “It’s also because once you become that unconscious will of the evil god, ‘He’ will stop the contamination.

“You are Boss Lin. Not an evil god, but a savior.”

Lin Jie gazed at Red, observing her rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes, and suddenly seemed to understand something.

“You’re right. It’s such a simple thing, yet I couldn’t understand it,” Lin Jie revealed a gentle smile and said, “Red, please remember... that there was once a Boss Lin who loved to sell books. Kindhearted and always eager to help others, this was the sort of person he was... So, he was loved by many people.”

Red nodded her head vigorously, at the same time feeling Lin Jie’s touch gradually becoming corporeal. She anxiously reached out to hold him, but realized that Lin Jie had completely turned into fog.

“Boss Lin!” she shouted, but the gray fog filling the entire underground had started to gradually shrink, quickly converging and retracting through the hole beside Red.

The gray fog that had existed in the underground for thousands of years finally dissipated, like the clear after a storm, and the contamination ceased at this moment.

The scaly skin on Red’s body gradually began to peel off, and the tentacles on her chin began to slowly retract back into her skin, revealing the appearance of a chubby little girl with fair and rosy skin.

Her red eyes witnessed that the contamination had started to stop for the people around her. They were jubilant, dancing and rejoicing at their rebirth.

But Red couldn't see herself, and she couldn't feel happy. With her vision blurred by tears, she just stared at the abyss that Lin Jie had entered.

There was hell where the savior that changed everything had stepped into.

Having arrived at the depths of the underground, Lin Jie emerged from the gray fog. His black cloak, like the robe of a pilgrim, spread out from the ground as the strong reeking stench of blood hit his nose. The nest of the evil god, constructed of flesh and blood, spread across the entire underground palace.

And right in the center of the palace of flesh and blood was a throne full of bloody vessels. This was the divine seat that had been prepared for him for several thousands of years.

“Boss Lin!!!”

A familiar voice rang out from above, and Red, who had already recovered from the gray fog's corruption and regained her appearance as a young girl, was calling his name—

“Boss Lin! You aren't an evil god. You are my and everyone's savior!!!”

She kept shouting nonstop, till her voice became hoarse and she could no longer speak.

Lin Jie listened to her voice as he slowly trudged toward the divine throne, like a prodigal son returning home after many years, and also like a martyr with the mindset of ‘If I don't go to hell, who will?’

He sat down and sank into a peaceful, deep sleep.

Chapter 456: Welcome (End)

Chapter 456: Welcome (End)

The rain was heavy and hard hitting, as if gravel was being thrown down from the sky. The droplets of water pounded the ground and washed away the scent of blood.

In a certain sense, this heavy downpour had saved Blade's life.

Blade hid away in a precarious concrete jar within a deserted ditch. The bandages around his shoulders and legs were already completely dyed red. A physique like his that was specialized in combat wasn't any good at healing magic.

Magic—a new and even stronger power wielded by humans—had completely replaced all sorts of transcendent abilities that could only be obtained by tottering along the edge of madness a hundred years ago.

Humans could acquire magical abilities solely through their blood-line and by gazing upon magical creatures. Since the collapse of the barrier between the dream and reality a hundred years ago, the entire Azir had entered the era of higher magic.

The immense amount of aether that flowed out of the dream realm swept across the entire continent along with dream beasts—or, now termed magical creatures—and had awakened human blood-lines, heralding Norzin's complete egress from the ignorant world that separated transcendents and mortals.

In this day and age, it was near impossible to survive in Azir if one wasn't a mage.

From Blade's name, it was clear that a part of his blood-line originated from the Lower District, for he had no surname.

The head of the Church of Pestilence, Red, had led all the old humans in the Lower District back to the surface. Planned and

designed by the former Supreme-rank Truth Union wise man, ‘Ethereal Wisdom’ Raziel, the current Norzin was even greater and vaster than before.

Since those of the Lower District had lived in close proximity to God for thousands of years, their spiritual knowledge and aptitude were higher. Or, in other words, those with blood-line originating from the Lower District were rare magic geniuses.

Unfortunately, this was still a world where the strong dominated the weak. The Upper District had long surpassed the Lower District by having much more numbers and conducting magic research earlier.

Moreover, the teachings of the Church of Pestilence preached that all people of the Lower District were God’s chosen, which was a contrast to the largest and number one religion, the Sun’s Faith.

Even to this day, there were still transcendents that had lived since a hundred years ago who reckoned the blood-line of the Lower District to be lowly.

The so-called peaceful coexistence... was completely an illusion of a precarious balance.

Perhaps I ought to cherish this sort of life... thought Blade.

After all, it was said that his ancestors from several centuries ago were monstrous creatures in the Lower District that were enslaved and were viewed as existence that were neither human nor creature.

“Thank you, my lord. Thank you, my saintess.” Blade used his fingers and drew a circle on his chest—the symbol of the Church of Pestilence.

On a side note, there was only one god in all of Azir, but there were two major religions—the Church of Pestilence and Sun’s Faith.

The two worshiped the same god, but because of conflicts in interpretation of the different doctrines, each year, the two leaders, Religious Head Red and Sun’s Faith’s Pope Vincent, could be seen

denouncing each other on television broadcasts.

After Blade finished praying, the wounds on his body emitted a faint light and gradually healed. The saintess and God truly existed, so miracles like these weren't rare.

Blade raised his arm and removed the long bandages, revealing clear scales on his arm. He was actually a little different from others. Half of his blood-line came from dream beasts.

After Witch Silver had integrated the dream realm with the real world, dream beasts and humans spread out all over the continent. As creatures constituting of powerful magic, the races that Witch Silver protected, such as the ancient dragons and elves, were naturally the noblest of existences.

A noble and lowly body was indeed a very sad existence. Not to mention that he was a test subject of his ambitious father.

"I hope it all ends quickly..." muttered Blade before he turned and rushed into the rain.

"Found him?" A white-clothed officer of the search team asked his subordinates that had rushed over. The uniforms they wore were a combination of scientific rigor and knightly romanticism, with a sigil of an ouroboros and crossed swords on their shoulders.

—This was the symbol of the 'Norzin Council.'

According to legends, about a hundred years ago, during the Great Change, an enraged God sent a silver dragon to punish angels that had fallen from grace and tried themselves to become gods. The fallen angels called the Path of the Flaming Sword were completely annihilated by God.

At that time, a huge human organization, Secret Rite Tower, was severely damaged due to its collusion with the fallen angels.

In the end, they merged with another organization, the Truth Union, thoroughly joining all forces and were renamed as the

Norzin Council, which headed all of Norzin's affairs. Norzin Council was led by Great Radiant Knight Joseph as the Chairman, and the original Vice-Chairman of the Truth Union, Andrew, assumed the position of... Vice-Chairman.

It was said that Andrew had been a Vice-Chairman for several centuries and people who loathed him termed him the 'Vice-Chairman for ten thousand years.' In Norzin slang, the term 'Andrew' was even used to refer to a deputy.

"Blade—" the leading officer muttered. "The person who has this name must be caught no matter what. He's the son of the head of the Lower District's extremist group."

"The bounty on the rebel leader's head would last us several lifetimes." One subordinate chuckled. "His son, too."

The lead officer glanced at his subordinate and said, "That fellow was at the 16th District. He wouldn't show up here." This caused looks of disappointment to show up throughout the party.

"So that's why the defense here is so weak... and what's with those regrettable expressions?" A distinctly youthful voice was especially clear amid the heavy downpour.

Several officers instinctively turned around, raising their sophisticated magic weapons and aiming at the white-haired youth that appeared in front of them.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

A magical glow was emitted from their gun barrels.

Unfortunately, in the next second, Blade seemed to have become one with the curtain of rain, passing through them like a shifting wind. By the time the lead officer made out Blade's appearance, everyone's heads had already fallen to the ground.

Warm, steaming blood spurted out from the corpses, dying the entire ground red.

"Who gave you all the confidence to get rid of me?" Blade scoffed.

However, Blade's body couldn't take it much longer even if it only lasted a few seconds. He immediately perked up and left the encirclement.

So what if I leave... I already have no home to return to.

Just as those search officers had said, Blade was indeed the son of the Lower District's resistance movement. It was also true that he was a product of his inhumane father's experiments with dream beasts. Blade had no interest in extremist acts and didn't want to join, so he had fled the resistance movement.

If there was anyone in Norzin that absolutely couldn't be sheltered, it would probably be me, right? Blade thought to himself self-deprecatingly.

As he fled, Blade couldn't let his imagination run wild.

— Perhaps I can join the hunters. They never care about the origins of their members and will accept people with dream beast blood.

The leader of the hunters was a mysterious woman. As the son of one of the top extremists, Blade had heard about her.

Her name was Ji Zhixiu. She was a powerful Supreme-rank mage and also the head of Norzin's Hunter Organization. The underground hunter network she established was a hub for intelligence, and even Norzin Council relied on her.

And there was no doubt that Ji Zhixiu was a powerful existence that could even call upon the wind and rain.

However, it was rumored that the relationship between Ji Zhixiu and the Ash Tree Chamber of Commerce's Century Witch, Cherry Chapman, was so bad that they nearly fought each time they met. Rumors had it that it was over a man whose whereabouts had been unknown for a long time.

Tsk, I really don't understand the mentality of these old women... Blade thought to himself silently. In such a situation, the gossip secrets of such big shots could be considered a form of entertainment to ease his own suffering.

But in truth, even the hunters wouldn't take in a person like himself who was like a ticking time bomb to Norzin.

"At least I've escaped the encirclement..." Blade surveyed his surroundings and breathed a sigh of relief.

The rain continued to pour.

In the distance, only one building was still lit, and the 'Open' sign at the door swayed in the wind.

"A bookstore?"

Should I... hide inside?

Such a thought unconsciously appeared in Blade's head and made him make a beeline for that bookstore.

A round, full moon appeared within the dream.

Mu'en stood barefoot on an endless expanse of calm water. Ripples extended from beneath her feet, disrupting the reflection of the starry sky on the water's surface. The dark sky full of stars and the water surface met, as if merging into one.

Mu'en was dreaming. She seldom dreamed anymore. As an ordinary bookstore owner—although she preferred to be called Lady Boss—she no longer dreamed of the night.

Someone had dragged her into this dream. Her dream self was draped in a black veil, wearing a black long dress with magnificent layered hemlines. The cloak on her shoulders faintly resembled the night sky, and black gloves clad her two hands.

The authority of the night had already been handed over, and the residual power and memories of Walpurgis, who no longer existed, had been inherited by Mu'en.

But the dream today, which should only have belonged to the night, was unusual.

Soon, the lake surface under Mu'en's feet froze into a thin layer of ice, and the sky began to snow. And in the dream, an old tree covered in white frost grew quickly, with a beautiful white lady sitting underneath it.

"Silver..." Mu'en frowned. Seeing the arrival of her old friend didn't bring her much joy.

"It's been awhile, Mu'en." Silver gave an elegant smile. "There's no need to be so guarded... Oh, it looks like Walpurgis left you with some bad memories."

Mu'en eyed Silver indifferently as if she would leave immediately if Silver didn't get to the point.

"Do you miss him?" Silver asked.

Mu'en's ice-cold expression wavered slightly when she heard the question and subconsciously looked up, only to see Silver's playful expression.

The young lady's cheeks were slightly flushed, and she was about to explain herself, but she noticed Silver withdrew her sly yet gentle expression and gazed into a distance before saying in a voice that was as light as the white snow all around them—

"I miss him too."

At the edge of the gray fog, an old man in aged robes slumbered on an ancient stone throne. One elbow rested on the armrest, supporting his head, and a jade-green ring was clearly visible on his thumb.

His dust-caked face moved slightly, then a pair of gray-blue eyes shot open.

I've guarded the fringes of the gray fog for too long... Wilde sighed softly as he gazed at the black sky above. This was the same spot his teacher had once sat.

He loosened his limbs and picked up a lantern as he walked slowly toward the depths of the gray fog, the ends of his tattered robe dragging along the ground.

A hundred years ago, the wall of fog collapsed and chaos reigned in the world. Till today, there hadn't yet been anyone who dared take this step.

And now, Wilde was going to do it. He would be the first person to explore this gray fog, which was also his teacher's dying wish.

Suddenly, Wilde's body froze, his eyes widening as he turned back. A sudden inspiration surged through his body.

He seemed to see himself from many years ago, dragging his injured body as he slowly walked toward a bookstore.

Blade dragged his exhausted body along, feeling an acute pain in his abdomen.

It was only then did he realize he had also been shot in the stomach, but his highly tense self had ignored it.

Indeed... It was an impossible wish to escape the Council's search and find the hunter organization led by Ji Zhixiu, then persuading her to let him join.

He looked at the building emitting a warm yellow light in front of him. Since this was the case, he could only find a place to heal first, and then...

Figuring it out would come later.

As he approached, Blade observed the bookstore.

The shop stood in the rain, with warm light filtering through the blurry display window, revealing rows of bookshelves inside.

Aside from the bookstore, everything else in the area was dark. There were many shops in the vicinity, but with such heavy rain,

this was the only one in operation.

The hanging sign at the entrance displayed “Open,” and there was a crudely made step for easy accessibility at the entrance. It looked strangely incongruous with its surroundings.

Blade clutched his stomach as the smell of blood was washed away by the rain. Perhaps this was a way out, or perhaps it was a trap?

But even if it was a trap, what did it matter now? Regardless of the choice he made, his fate would still remain the same, wouldn't it?

He hung his head and grimaced, feeling resigned in this heavy rain.

Blade trudged up the crudely made step and pushed open the door to the bookstore.

Jingle.

The bell hanging on the door frame gave a crisp jingle.

There was only one young man who looked about Blade's age in the quiet bookstore.

This man, dressed in a black shirt and trousers with a head full of dark hair that contrasted to his pale skin, was engrossed in reading a book. Placed in front of him on the counter were two cups of hot tea, but there weren't any other customers.

Two cups of tea? Was he waiting for me?

Blade stiffened and eyed the young man before him cautiously, trying to figure out if he was friend or foe.

Too many people wanted to kill Blade, and so many others wanted to use him. Yet, this young man seemed like he wished to communicate with him?

Before Blade could say anything, the young man finally closed the book and looked up at him—

“I didn't wait too long this time, but... welcome.”

The bookstore owner gazed at Blade with his dark eyes that seemed endless and said with a gentle smile on his face, "From the look of things, you seem to have encountered some trouble?"

(END)